

LETTERS  
TO  
THE BRITISH NATION,  
AND TO  
THE INHABITANTS OF EVERY OTHER COUNTRY,  
WHO MAY HAVE HEARD OF  
THE LATE SHAMEFUL OUTRAGES  
*Committed in this Part of the Kingdom.*

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PART IV.

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Occasioned by the Appearance of a Pamphlet, intitled  
*'A Reply to the Rev. Dr. Priestley's Appeal to the  
Public on the Subject of the Riots at Birmingham.'*

BEING THE JOINT PRODUCTION OF  
THE PRINCIPAL CLERGY OF THAT PLACE AND  
OF ITS VICINITY;

Having in its Title-page the Signature of the Rev. E. BURN, M.A.

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BY THE REV. J. EDWARDS.

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All the charges we have hitherto seen against us, are all villainous,  
malicious lies, which to do them justice, not one of them believes,  
though they would have the mob believe it.

DR FRANKLIN.

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*Birmingham,*  
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LONDON.

# LETTERS

TO

THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

AND BY

THE MANAGERS OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

AND ALL OTHERS

THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

PART IV.

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## LETTERS.

### LETTER VII.

He that is first in his own cause seemeth just, but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him

SOLOMON.

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MY COUNTRYMEN,

THE Dissenters previous to the publication of my last number, had respectfully referred themselves to the administration of their country. Government had voluntarily and at its own expence, conducted the prosecutions against the rioters. On this account, the Dissenters were encouraged to look up to government for the impartial statement and righteous redress of every other grievance, resulting from the late unhappy tumults. This expectation, in conjunction with other circumstances, has considerably delayed the publication of the following remarks upon the remaining sections of the Reply.

But the wisdom of the legislature, has thought proper to postpone for a time any public investigation, and has by that means disappointed the dependence I had placed on a series of documents, which, if this had taken place, would have become public property, and which of course, I might safely have made use of, as proofs in the prosecution of my design. Yet, though for the present, deprived of the advantage I expected from these, I trust I have got proofs, more than sufficient, to support such a

statement of facts, as shall enable you to decide upon the truth or falsehood of those things which are affirmed in the Appeal, and are denied in the Reply.

Without noticing those jeering remarks made by the clergy upon the Doctor's Narrative, I pass over to that passage which treats of

### HIGH CHURCH BIGOTRY.

Dr. Priestley relates that he saw with regret, the spirit of party ran higher in the town of Birmingham than in most other places in the kingdom. As this observation, though introduced in the Reply, is not even attempted to be refuted, I shall not trouble the reader with a formal defence of it, but leave him to form a judgment of its truth or falsehood from the instances I shall produce.

As persons unacquainted with the character of the place could make no allowance for it, the Doctor naturally believed that his countrymen would be inclined to consider him as the chief cause of that conduct in the clergy which wore the appearance of uncommon bigotry. And the Reply favours this idea when it attributes the behaviour of Mr. Curtis to Mr. Scholefield, solely to the danger he would by that means be in, of acting officially (that is, of going to a funeral in company) with Dr. Priestley; whom, says the Reply, Mr. Curtis justly considered as guilty of excesses, in the highest degree illiberal and indecent, in his opposition to the doctrines and discipline of the church.

Instead of vindicating the clergy of Birmingham from the charge of refusing to accompany Dissenting ministers to funerals, instead of proving that this conduct, unparalleled in any other town in Great Britain, was occasioned by their dislike to the Doctor; the Reply enters into a defence



fence of the individual Mr. Curtis, whose right to act as he pleased, as it was never disputed, did not stand in need of vindication. The proofs that this conduct of the clergy added nothing to the bigotry of their hearers, drawn from an assertion of the Doctor, that he had lived happily in this part of the country for near ten years, and that the Dissenters and churchmen had from their infancy lived in terms of good neighbourhood, are so idle and frivolous, as to deserve no answer. However, as they have insinuated that the Doctor has given a false statement of facts in this place, it is requested of the reader to pay particular attention to those which follow.

The late Rev. S. Bourn being invited to attend the funeral of Mr. Gisborne with the Rev. Mr. Dovey, rector of St. Martin's, since deceased; Mr. Dovey directed Mr. Bourn to walk behind the corpse, Mr. Bourn refused. Mr. Dovey expressed great anger at Mr. Bourn's not complying; Mr. Bourn said he had been desired by the friends of the deceased to walk before the corpse, and he would not be guilty of deserting his post. Mr. Dovey then endeavoured to get rid of Mr. Bourn by out-walking him; but Mr. Bourn still keeping close to his side, Mr. Dovey converted his walk into a run; still, however, as Mr. Dovey increased the swiftness of his pace, Mr. Bourn copied his example. The consequence was, the corpse and its attendants were double distanced, and the two clergymen found themselves alone at the church-gate. Mr. Dovey took this so much to heart, that after the funeral was over, he sent back the hat-band, scarf, &c. and even the very pins made use of on that occasion.

In the year 1770, the Rev. S. Blyth, pastor of the congregation which then assembled in the New Meeting, attended the funeral of a lady in company with Dr. Ashworth. Mr. Dovey, who was at that time rector of St. Martin's church, was the officiating minister. A coach  
was

was provided to accommodate Mr. Dovey, Dr. Ashworth, and Mr. Blyth. Mr. Dovey, politely indeed, and with good humour, absolutely declined going into the same coach with dissenting ministers. Mr. Blyth urged his taking a place from motives of sympathy, because he conceived a refusal to do it on the side of Mr. Dovey, would add to the painful feelings which the husband of the deceased must necessarily experience on such an occasion. Notwithstanding these forcible reasons, suggested by delicacy and compassion, Mr. Dovey persevered in declining it, but said he would settle that matter with the gentleman himself. Mr. Dovey afterwards told the gentleman that when the Dissenters wished their own ministers to attend their friends to the grave, they had better not invite the clergy of the establishment.

Some time after this, the same gentleman had the direction of the funeral of the late Mr. Haddock, and in consequence of what Mr. Dovey had said, omitted to invite him; and no hatband, scarf, or gloves, being sent him, he was much mortified; for, it seems, he had a considerable attachment to the perquisites of his office, and sent to inform the gentleman, that he never meant to refuse what was usually given by Dissenters on these occasions.

At the funeral of the late Mr. Stephens of Deritend, the dissenting minister who was invited to attend with the Rev. Mr. Austed, was desired by the friends of the deceased to ride on horseback before the hearse. But Mr. Austed, not less endued with the spirit of priestly pride and high church bigotry than his brother abovementioned, objected to it, and ordered the dissenting minister, a man of most respectable character, to ride behind the hearse.

It is something more than forty years ago, since the Rev. Mr. Blyth was invited to attend the funeral of the grandmother of William Russell, Esq. and was desired to walk

walk before the corpse in company with three other dissenting ministers. Mr. Wearden, curate of St. Phillip's, was the officiating clergyman. He expressed concern, that having received orders to the contrary, he could not walk with Mr. Blyth and the other ministers. He accordingly left them at the house, and met the corpse at the churchyard. Mr. Vyse was at that time rector of St. Phillip's.

A minister of the church of England, who was formerly curate of St. Martin's, if not to the present rector of that church, asserted he left Birmingham because party spirit ran so high among church people there, that he could not live in it with comfort.

In the reply, page 3, we are told that it was not long after the arrival of Dr. Priestley, and the Rev. Mr. Curtis, that the application was made by Mr. Scholefield to the latter, to know whether he might be permitted to accompany him to a funeral. Now it happened that this application was made, A. D. 1784, when Dr. Priestley and Mr. Curtis had been respectively minister of the New Meeting, and rector of St. Martin's about four years, which, to be sure, is not a very long period, when compared with an antediluvian existence, but which, notwithstanding the space is made so light of by Mr. Burn, constitutes a tenth part of the active life of most of the individuals of our modern generations. This circumstance is not entirely unimportant. Had it happened at the early period to which the Reply would seem to assign it, and before Mr. Curtis had become acquainted with the genuine spirit of Birmingham bigotry, it is not impossible but he might have complied with it. Mr. Burn was quite mis-informed when he stated that Mr. Curtis declined accompanying Mr. Scholefield to a funeral, lest that compliance should lead him to walk with Dr. Priestley. Mr. Curtis himself gave a very different reason, viz. that the spirit of the place prior  
to

to his, and by consequence prior to the Doctor's coming, would not permit him.

That Dr. Priestley was neither the cause nor the object of that excessive bigotry which has reigned with unexampl'd sway in the town of Birmingham for half a century, may be farther attested from the rules of the Blue Coat Charity School, which is that mentioned p. 7, of the Appeal, and which has existed upwards of forty years.

Now these rules have been in existence as long as the institution, and constitute a standing and irrefragable proof of the equal longevity of that high church bigotry peculiar to Birmingham.

Rule the 26th of this institution, directs in the most absolute and unqualified manner, that no children shall be bound apprentices to persons who are not of the ESTABLISHED CHURCH.

The 22nd rule of this institution ordains, that those *children only* shall be admitted who are of the *established church*. In consequence of this rule, Thomas Collet, who was put into the Blue School more than thirty years past, by the late Mr. Henry Henn, being afterwards discovered to be the son of a Dissenter, it was with very great reluctance that he was permitted to continue. Nothing but the great influence Mr. Henn had with the governors prevented the expulsion of the boy from that charity.

This narrow spirit has been suffered to operate even to the detriment of the institution : for a subscription, unconditionally offered, was some time since refused, because the person who offered it was a Dissenter. These facts are offered in proof of what the Doctor advances in page 7, of the Appeal. Compare this with the conduct of the Dissenters



senters in an institution of a similar nature supported by them. In that school the children of churchmen are not only permitted to receive every advantage of clothing and instruction, but are allowed by an express law to attend the public worship of the establishment twice every sabbath day, with no other proviso than that of not abusing the privilege to purposes of idleness.

I shall have done with this part of the Reply, when I have remarked that at the very moment the officious zeal of the curate of St. Mary's is endeavouring to vindicate his brother Curtis from the charge of bigotry, he himself, like an unskilful advocate, fixes the crime upon his client, in a manner which an adversary had it not in his power to do; \* while at the same time, he discovers no small spice of bigotted virulence against the Doctor in his own breast, when he says Mr. Curtis "justly (this adverb marks the full concurrence of the writer in the sentiment expressed) considered Dr. Priestley as having been carried by his opposition to the church, into excesses in the highest degree illiberal and indecent." Ought these clergymen to be so indignant against the Doctor on account of crimes in which they themselves indulge? Was there nothing *illiberal* in Mr. Curtis's refusal to walk in company with Mr. Scholefield? Is there nothing *indecent* in giving disturbance to the minds of those who are in the midst of heavy distress, and in the moment in which they most stand in need of consolation? And is it not both *illiberal* and *indecent* to

\* Mr. Burn, as a man of principle and consistency, would hardly have entered so warmly into a vindication of his brother Curtis's christian candour and liberality of sentiment, had he not exerted his talent at forgetfulness or received good proofs of that gentleman's conversion. If the recollection of his Rev. brother's conduct in refusing to sign the certificate of his qualifications at the time he was about to present himself a candidate for orders, because he had previously officiated as a Dissenting preacher actually obtruded itself—this is an instance of a disposition in Mr. Burn so charitable and forgiving, as ought not to be passed over without its due praise.



charge any man with misdemeanours, as the clergy have done in this passage, without offering a single instance in proof?

What has been advanced on this subject in these paragraphs, will, I trust, be abundantly sufficient to prove the truth of the allegations in p. 4, 5, 6, 7, of the Appeal, and abundantly sufficient to refute what is insinuated in p. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, of the Reply. And Mr. Burn may now find that "the difference between the clergy and the Dissenters, on points confessedly non-essential, has very frequently in the town of Birmingham interrupted that good neighbourhood (for the instances I have produced are neither all nor the most glaring) and that interchange of kind offices so necessary to the comfortable existence of society." See Reply p. 36.

The next thing which I recommend to your notice, is the business of

#### THE LIBRARY.

Dr. Priestley, with a view to vindicate himself from the horrid charge fixed upon him, by several anonymous authors and others, of being the original cause and fomentor of the riots of 1791, affirms, that he was backward in entering into controversy with the clergy of the town. And from this motive suffered several virulent attacks upon him from the press to pass unnoticed. See Appeal, p. 5.

The Doctor farther relates, that so far from having differed with the clergy of Birmingham on account of their being ministers and believers of the established religion, his first difference arose from four of them withdrawing from the public library, because Dr. Priestley's History of the Corruptions of Christianity had been voted into it. He affirms, that he himself, for a long time, strenuously opposed

opposed the introduction of controversy, and that when at length he concurred in the measure, it was because its fund had become opulent, and on the express condition, that books on both sides should be equally purchased. And he appeals to the inhabitants of Birmingham whether his conduct in this particular, was not uniformly open and generous. This statement you will find more at large in the Appeal, p. 11 and 12.

On the other hand, the Reply p. 12, 13, 14, vindicates the conduct of these four clergymen in not submitting their opinion to that of a majority of the society, on the score of their thinking that the flourishing state of the funds, which was one inducement to Dr. Priestley to concur in the introduction of controversy, had not yet arrived, and that whenever it did, still it would be proper to consider that kind of reading which generally interested a society intended to embrace men of every persuasion, as the most useful.

It then ironically assures us, "the only fault in the conduct of these clergymen on this occasion, was, that they presumed to give an opinion on what appeared to them the proper conduct of the library."

The pains which Dr. Priestley took in new modelling the library, which every member of the society knows was in a state of insignificance, till he gave it extension and stability, are then kindly turned into ridicule. The Reply proceeds to affirm, that Dr. Priestley's arbitrary temper, which could not brook that any of his measures should be even deemed fallible, and his disappointment at not being able to carry every thing his own way, were the sole causes of the Doctor's withdrawing himself from the committee. With pretended sorrow it adds, we never saw great talents so degraded by party considerations as in the conduct of Dr. Priestley in this business.

The

The concluding sentences of this part of the Reply in particular, and indeed the whole of the section, is so exceedingly virulent and so entirely false, that I am all astonishment at the want of common decency which could send it into the world. They accuse Dr. Priestley of the unworthiest conduct, and attribute that conduct, as though they had searched his heart to the unworthiest motives. We are told that Dr. Priestley employed falsehood, to make the four clergymen contemptible, for no other reason, than because they had the misfortune to differ from him in opinion. They represent him as unjust, dishonest, and guilty of wilful lying. It is therefore necessary, in order to vindicate him from such disgraceful charges, to publish the following account, which the candour and mercy of Dissenters, to the characters of the clergy, and their sympathy with the feelings of their fellow beings of the established sect, have hitherto suppressed. The public will, after the perusal of the following fair and accurate account, which I call upon upon the clergy to disprove if they can, be able to determine on which side the guilt of the clerical accusations in the section under refutation will be most likely to fall.

The Birmingham Library originated with the Dissenters; and was first established in November 1779. The number of subscribers at its commencement, amounted to no more than nineteen, of whom one only was a member of the establishment. Far from wishing with a narrow and selfish spirit, to confine within the circle of their own particular views, the advantages resulting from such an institution, the first founders, with a liberal anxiety to extend its usefulness, communicated their scheme to many of the respectable laity of Birmingham and to some of the clergy with an invitation to join them, which the latter at that time refused to accept. The next year Dr. Priestley came to reside in the neighbourhood, who not only cheerfully

fully subscribed, but undertook to new model the laws after the plan of a similar institution at Leeds, which he had been instrumental in promoting. By this plan, books which are proposed by the subscribers at large, are selected by a committee, consisting of twenty persons chosen by the subscribers at an anniversary. But the committee have not the power of making, or repealing laws, which can only be done at the anniversary.

From this time the number of subscribers of all persuasions rapidly increased. In the year 1783, the first clergyman of the establishment subscribed, and he was at the ensuing anniversary, chosen of the committee; and soon after, his example was followed by others of his brethren. Every thing passed with the greatest appearance of harmony, till the year 1785, when the word *reverend* was *blotted* from before the names of Dr. Priestley and Mr. Scholefield. This transaction was discovered before the ink was dry with which it was effected. And it can be proved that no one had access to the book within that space of time, except the rector of St. Martin's, and another gentleman who cannot be suspected. The next year a number of subscribers who resided in the Hamlet of Deritend, considering themselves slighted on account of some books they had proposed, not being admitted, formed a list, by which they gained a majority in the committee, of which committee, a majority was of the establishment. By this committee, Dr. Priestley's *Corruptions of Christianity* was voted in,—it had been often proposed, but as often rejected by the Doctor's desire, who did not wish this, or any other controversial work to be introduced, till the fund of the library enabled them to admit all sides of the question. And it is observable, that when the book was voted in, Mr. Russell, the only Dissenter present, voted against it, in which he was joined only by one gentleman. The rector of St. Martin's, however, expressed his disapprobation, by a protest in the minute book, in which he  
declared



declared unless a meeting was called to prevent the introduction of such works, he would withdraw his name, and called upon all churchmen to follow his example\*. In this he was followed by Messrs. James, Shipley, and Noble, but they were not attended to, nor was the least notice taken of their protest at the next anniversary in December 1786.†

\* When persons associate together for the purpose of cutting a canal, building a ship, or promoting any branch of manufacture or commerce, do they usually regard the sect of each person in their discussions concerning the object of their association? Certainly not. For their object being the same, whatever is actually detrimental to their success, hurts the Dissenter just as much as the churchman, and is of equal prejudice to the Jew, and to the Gentile, and not more so. Any person who had an understanding and at the same time the use of it, must see, and every man of candour must acknowledge, that no member of a public library ought to introduce invidious distinctions into that society, founded upon the sentiments of any member of that society, on any point irrelevant to the interest or to the object of that society. And the man who should make his folly conspicuous, by calling upon persons to act so contrary to the order of such an institution, as was done by the Rev. gentleman above-mentioned, or should introduce any topic of religious or political controversy, into such a society in any other way than in the books which contain them, ought to be severely fined, if he ought at all to be permitted to remain in a society, the object of which he does not understand, or is determined to defeat.

#### † *Copies from the Books of the Library.*

May, 1786.—A well wisher to the Birmingham Library, is surprized to see the committee have so far degraded themselves, as to admit books of religious controversy. He believes it is quite contrary to the original plan of the institution, and therefore is obliged, however disagreeable to him, to withdraw his name till the committee adhere to general rules; and he hopes, sincerely hopes every member of the church of England will do the same.

(Signed) CHARLES CURTIS.

Many persons have been induced to subscribe to this library, as it was held forth to the world, that it should not further religious controversy; but as the case is otherwise, C. L. Shipley desires his name may be withdrawn.

John James desires for the same reason, to withdraw his name.

June, 1786.—As one of the first stewards of the Birmingham library, I think it incumbent upon me to declare, that it was the constant sense of the society when I was in the office of steward, that no books upon controversial divinity, nor law or physic, should be ever voted in; and which, when I was in that office, never happened. I think



These circumstances shew with what reluctance, not only the Dissenters but other members of the library were drawn into this quarrel, which evidently originated with the clergy of the establishment, and was supported by them. In a short time, however, Mr. Curtis and his reverend associates again entered their names, which they did without opposition, a circumstance much to be lamented, as their subsequent conduct shews they had by this time formed a different plan, in which they were principally assisted by Mr. Cooke. He made a motion for the exclusion of all controversial writings on the subject of divinity. This question was agitated with much heat and intemperance on both sides at the anniversary, 1787, but upon a ballot, a majority of 91, against 53, decided in favour of their admission. But notwithstanding this great majority on that question, only six Dissenters, of which two were quakers, were chosen upon the committee for the year ensuing. And it appeared that the clergy and their agents had been for some time handing about packed lists, to those they called friends to the establishment. This was proved at the meeting, for on Mr. Curtis denying that any such steps had been taken, proof was immediately adduced that what he asserted was false, by Mr. Forbes, of the High-street, declaring to the company that such a list had been presented to him by the Rev. Mr. James, one of the curates of St. Philip's, with a request to sign it.

Notwithstanding this, the conduct of the Dissenters was still calumniated, and an anonymous paper charging them with restlessness, and a desire to exclude the mem-

think the book in question a most improper one, and such as disgraces the collection of books it is now placed amongst: and had I remained longer in Warwickshire than I shall, I would undoubtedly erase my name from the society, that I might not any ways give encouragement to such a work being read.

(Signed)

M. NOBLE.

bers

bers of the establishment from the committee, was stuck up in the library. The author, supposed to be the said Mr. Cooke, was called upon at a general meeting, held February 18, 1789, but not chusing, though present, to substantiate his charge, it was considered as refuted, and the author pronounced an enemy to the prosperity of the library, and a disturber of the peace.

How far this disturbance is to be ascribed to the clergy as the principal fomentors, if not the sole authors of it may be seen from the very candid spirit their protests discover as well as from its agreement with other parts of their conduct. Lest the temper of any of my readers should be discomposed by such instances of complicated meanness and bigotry, it may not be amiss to suggest, that they argue as much deficiency in wisdom, as they do in candour, and in the end promote the cause they were intended to injure. For example, M. Noble's ignorant criticism upon a book which probably he had never read, might be an inducement to some one to peruse it, who otherwise would never have thought of it, and who in consequence of reading it, might be so convinced of the corruption of the establishment, as to become its foe.

But to return. The Dissenters far from suffering themselves to be provoked into any thing like violence, at the instance of Mr. Curtis did not permit the resolution above referred to, though carried by a majority of 49 against 25, to be introduced into the public advertisement with the other proceedings of the meeting. In this instance it is observable on the one hand, that the ostensible reason of Mr. Curtis's desire has been shewn by the subsequent conduct of his party, and indeed of himself, to have been nothing more than a mere pretence. And on the other hand, that what he stated as the ground of his opinion, and urged as a sufficient argument for inducing the Dissenters to comply with his wishes, was in fact the real motive of *their* conduct, is evident

dent from the following copy of an account of their proceedings on that occasion :

*A few days after the General Meeting above-mentioned, Mr. Thomas Richards having informed some of his friends among the Dissenters, that the Rev. Mr. Curtis had that forenoon intimated it to be his opinion, that if the Dissenters would consent that the vote of censure passed at the General Meeting of the subscribers to the Library on Wednesday, should not be inserted in the public prints, but in the books of the Library only, this measure would much contribute to prevent the continuance of party strife and contention.—A meeting of some of the principal Dissenters has been convened, and they now concur in deputing Mr. Harry Hunt, Mr. Thomas Richards, and Mr. Russell to wait upon Mr. Curtis, to assure him that they feel a pleasure in having this opportunity to shew their readiness to concur with him in his desire to promote peace and harmony; and freely consent to withdraw the advertisement of the vote of censure, trusting that it will have that happy effect.—This they think the more likely, as they are confident they are not the members of the establishment in general who have misrepresented the conduct of the Dissenters, but only a few persons who are prejudiced and ill-informed.*

J. Priestley  
William Russell  
George Humphrys  
John Coates  
John Ryland  
Samuel Pemberton

William Hunt  
Harry Hunt  
Samuel Ryland  
Thomas Richards  
John Lawrence  
John Kettle.

Nothing

Nothing can be more artless than this declaration. Indeed nothing can more clearly mark the peaceful disposition and undesigning views of the Dissenters than the whole history of this business, in which the reader will discern those artful means and those low stratagems to have been used by their opponents, which are equally the disdain of generous foes and of real friends, and which are at any time crowned with success more on account of the unsuspecting nature, of virtue than on account of any uncommon wisdom inherent in the minds of those who employ them.

It is obvious to remark that in Birmingham an institution of this nature is peculiarly beneficial. A taste for letters, and a desire of improving the mind in useful or even in curious knowledge, is infinitely better than idle dissipation, and boundless indulgence of the appetites and passions. Those who possess the faculties of observation and discernment, will allow that in this place, a desire of information and mental improvement unknown before, has discovered itself in the rising generation. And while it is acknowledged that on account of the conceit which generally accompanies the dawning of knowledge in unenlightened minds—much may have been assumed, and even much intemperance of language employed; yet must it at the same time be allowed that the effects have already in general been good, and will answer purposes of increasing utility in future..

In this point of view then, the Dissenters by giving rise to such an institution, might claim the merit of having rendered their country a substantial service. They might too, in return for their public spirit, and perpetual readiness to sacrifice their own particular views to the good of the whole, expect to have some little attention paid to their wishes, in the conduct of that which, without them, would have had no existence. Yet even this little prerogative, if it  
may



may be stiled such, they have been contented to wave; and have peaceably acquiesced in the disadvantage of being virtually excluded from any share in the management of the library, from the circumstance of a considerable majority of churchmen having for the last two or three years, been chosen upon the committee.

The paragraphs of the Reply beginning with "The Doctor having seen, &c." and ending with "the affectation of candour and christian meekness," accuse Dr. Priestley, by implication and insinuation, of every thing mean, little and despicable, as a man whose word is worthy of no credit. See Reply, p. 15, 16, 17. This is done, no doubt, with a view to render the truth suspected of what the Doctor has said, p. 8, 9, 10, of the Appeal, of his conduct respecting the interference of the Dissenters in the choice of public officers. As though they had proved the falsehood of every thing said on this business in the Appeal, they say, p. 17, "Dr. Priestley has advanced many things in his Appeal, which to us appear extraordinary; and what extremely encreases our difficulty is, that most of these extraordinary things are offered with the simplicity and calmness of conscious integrity." If any thing advanced by the Doctor does really appear extraordinary to the writers of the Reply, they are peculiarly unfortunate in grounding their defence on the circumstance of their innocent wonder, which will not prove to the satisfaction of the public, any assertion of an honest man to be untrue. Indeed the true cause of that increase of difficulty of which they complain, is found in Reply, p. 16, where they have some how slipt into a confession of the real truth, and tell us in plain English, "we are not in possession of facts." I cannot therefore see how they can controvert this part of the Doctor's Narrative to your satisfaction. But if you should wish for any corroboration of the Doctor's word in this instance, there will be no difficulty in procuring the affidavits



affidavits of more than two or three of as respectable witnesses as any the town of Birmingham can furnish, whose testimony cannot be doubted, as they were personally present at the time the conversations took place which the Doctor refers to.

The next point discussed in the Reply, is that which respects the affair of the

### TEST AND CORPORATION ACTS.

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It was hoped that these laws would have been expunged from the code by that spirit of liberality, which a few years ago appeared to pervade the public mind. Independent of this, there are reasons which may well be conceived to engage the churchman to join in the petition of a Dissenter to obtain the abrogation of decrees as disgraceful to the one as they are oppressive to the other.

Previous to the attempt, it might have been presumed that every loyal subject would join in wishing the abolition of a law which affected the royal prerogative, and is therefore unconstitutional.

It was supposed that no lover of his country would object to the repeal of an act, which would not allow the most virtuous and best qualified citizen to serve his country, while it permitted the greatest villains an easy opportunity of injuring it, by the improper discharge or wilful abuse of offices of trust and emolument.

It was supposed that every man of understanding would have blushed to be found supporting a statute, which involved in it the absurdity of permitting a man to be a  
member

member of the senate, while it operated to the exclusion of perhaps the same individual from the office of a tide-waiter.

It might with reason have been expected, that all who assumed the christian name, would have united as with one voice, in petitioning against any longer practising a violence, and exerting a power expressly forbid by their master.

Least of all was it apprehended that the clergy, who by their rubric are required to *repel open evil livers from the table of the Lord*, would have opposed all their influence to prevent the success of a petition, which would have rescued them from the compulsive obligation they are now under to admit communicants of no faith and of profligate manners.

Instead of this, the clergy, like the workmen at Ephesus, when they thought their craft in danger, stirred up the prejudices of the people, and opposed their activity and their influence to that tolerating disposition, which would have inclined the laity to forget the distinctions of sect, in favour of a body of their fellow-citizens, who, besides the respect due to them as cultivators of order, peace, and industry, had a claim upon the gratitude of their country for having first relinquished, and ever since patiently borne a diminution of their own particular rights, for the benefit of the whole community.

In this service of intolerance, none could well exceed in zeal or in exertion, some of the writers of the Reply. It is well known, that assisted with the advice, and inspired with the presence of an amiable attorney, with enthusiastic diligence, they traversed the county to procure the names of gentlemen to an advertisement calling a meeting of the county.

In

In addition to this, the political claims of the Dissenters were considered in the midst of the solemnities of religion, and, under the form of sermons, inflammatory sentences issued from the pulpit, which might have roused from their slumbers the sympathetic ashes of Sacheverell.

The remembrance of the civil war was renewed; the bloody tragedy of Charles's martyrdom was painted to the imagination of the trembling people in the most vivid colours; and these events, in accents of horror, were entirely attributed to the Dissenters of that day, taking care at the same time to insinuate that those of the present day held principles equally dangerous and unconstitutional, and only wanted power and opportunity to act the same part.

These exertions, like drugs of sovereign potency, revived each dying prejudice, and communicated youthful vigour to the palsied form of Bigotry.

The manner in which the Reply has condescended to vindicate the line of conduct observed by the clergy on this occasion is peculiarly defective, and to the thinking mind must be quite unsatisfactory—calling a spirited remonstrance a “bold menace,” and writing a letter to the prime minister, “*insulting the whole English nation, in the person of one of its most virtuous representatives,*” are among the little arts to which the weakness of their cause obliges the writers of the Reply to resort.

Being forced to allow the general merits of the Dissenters as a body, they have endeavoured to render them odious by perverse misrepresentations of the principles and language of an unpopular individual, and round assertions that the whole body is governed by his particular maxims\*.

\* The courtier-like spirit of Mr. Burn, recoils with every mark of apparent horror, and shrinks as though blasphemy were uttered, when  
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The only tenable ground they have chosen, the only plausible argument they have advanced, is this—"The Dissenters met together publicly, and we did no more; he then who accuses *us* in this instance, charges the *Dissenters* with equal guilt; for our conduct was suggested by, and is similar to theirs." But are all actions alike, that are similar in the external fact? If they are not, what is it that makes them to differ? is it not the motive which prompts them? is it not the end in view, which makes one action virtuous, and another vicious? which makes the performance of the self-same deed a duty or a crime?

Before they compare their conduct with that of the Dissenters, and found their apology for it upon imitation of them, let us consider what was the end for which the meetings of the Dissenters were called, and what the motive by which the clergy were urged to what they are pleased to call a similar proceeding.\*

he finds the minister stiled insidious, by a man who had proof of that minister's large professions, and scanty performances; yet the uncommon delicacy of this gentleman, raises no scruples in his mind, while he represents Dr. Priestley as entertaining the most seditious and destructive designs, whether he writes in a warm style to the minister, or preaches in a temperate one to those, who together with himself, are oppressed. Whether Mr. Burn, like some of the infatuated wretches who, mistaught and misled, thought they were serving the king by destroying the property, and abusing the persons of his subjects, actually believes that Dr. Priestley intends to usurp the British throne, I cannot absolutely prove, but it is surely the part of charity to believe so. Otherwise every impartial man must allow that no person of strict integrity could have written what is contained in p. 18—23 inclusive, of the Reply, where indeed the eye is not permitted to see all that it was intended the mind should understand. This, however, in a moral point of view, makes no material alteration.

Philoctetes did not speak a word to Ulysses when he stamped on the place where the ashes of Hercules were deposited, yet his guilty foot wounded by the fall of one of the poisoned arrows of that hero, was deemed a just punishment of violated faith.

Mr. Burn has not in so many words called Dr. Priestley a rebel and a traitor, but if he has given his readers sufficient reason to believe him such, he certainly ought first of all to have believed it himself.

\* It was prudent in the writers of the Reply, when they say in their 24th page "of this (transaction) upon the whole, we know of no clergyman



The Dissenters met together for the purpose of exercising a right which every Englishman possesses, of petitioning parliament for release from the disgraceful and oppressive strictures by which their natural rights were narrowed, and that by means of a law which was never designed to operate against them.

clergyman who either is, or *ought to be* ashamed." I say it was prudent to qualify this sentence with the words in *Italics* so as to make it the declaration of an opinion of their own, or of an absolute fact, as should be most convenient in case its authenticity should be called in question.

The words "no clergyman" in this passage appear not to be extended in their meaning beyond the limits of Warwickshire. It is an unpleasant circumstance in the situation of an inhabitant of this county not to be able to controvert an accusation so very disgraceful. I wish I could exonerate the clergy from a charge so much to their discredit. But such is the bad eminence the clergy of Warwickshire have attained in bigotry, that I cannot hear of one who was ashamed of supporting measures which tended to injure good citizens on account of their religious belief. Not even Mr. Curtis, who was born a Dissenter, nor Mr. Burn, who not long ago had to encounter that priestly scorn from his high church brethren which now he has adopted and exercises, as naturally as if he had been educated at Oxford, and had never preached in a Dissenting meeting-house—can in this instance be brought as exceptions.

Had the phrase "no clergyman" been intended to include all the clergy of the church of England, known to the replicants, I should have endeavoured to inform them better on this subject, by recommending to their perusal, a pamphlet entitled, *A Defence of Dr. Price, and the Reformers of England*. Mr. Wyvill, its author, as a consistent patriot, and a good writer in the cause of liberty, has merit far beyond my praise. But it is a high gratification to turn from the narrow bigotry and unprovoked virulence of the Reply, to the candid, manly, and temperate sentiments of this excellent clergyman.

If any of those who from their situation have had no opportunity, or from their education no desire of hearing any thing on the subject, but the inflammatory sermons which some of the clergy are but too fond of delivering, or of seeing any thing but the equally inflammatory writings of those who are alarmed lest their emoluments should be lost or diminished, or make an ostentatious display of zeal for the established church, in order to obtain a higher rank in it—If any of these should by chance, or from curiosity read this, I earnestly request them to peruse with attention, and consider with impartiality what is advanced by this gentleman—the following sentiments are well worthy the regard of every one.

"In these measures the Protestant Dissenters concurred, with equal temper and moderation, and with signal unanimity throughout the kingdom. But if any man should entertain a suspicion, that under this cloak of moderation they covered sinister designs at that time, it is but impartial justice



They met to call upon their fellow citizens to join with them in requesting leave to resume privileges which they had relinquished for the benefit of the whole nation, in a time of danger, now that every one must acknowledge that danger to be at an end.

justice to state, that the suspicion must be ill-founded, that it is contradicted by facts which prove their attachment to the true principles of the constitution, at that season of great and general discontent, when any latent disloyalty to the Prince, any secret wish to change the general frame of our government would have been disclosed by the heat and effervescence of the times. The reverse of these dispositions then was theirs; in every meeting, of which the Dissenters composed a majority, or any considerable part, it may be remarked with truth, that the language of their Petitions, and of their plans of association, strongly expressed their adherence to the principles of our mixed government, by king, lords, and commons. I shall particularly point out the petition of the county of Cambridge in 1780, that of the county of Kent in 1782, and the forms of association adopted about that time by the towns of Cambridge and Nottingham, as containing evident proofs of this assertion.

These circumstances appear sufficiently to exculpate the Dissenters from the charge of disaffection at that juncture; and since the preservation of our constitutional liberties, and of the Brunswick family on the throne, may be justly ascribed in a great measure to their zeal and attachment, often manifested in times of public distress and danger; any charge of disaffection on that respectable body of men, now when public affairs are conducted with prosperity and with attention to the interests and opinions of the community, must appear highly improbable; and if not established by very clear and decisive proofs, ought to be rejected as a groundless and incredible accusation.

“And yet this injurious imputation, which on the late motion for a repeal of the Test laws was urged against the Dissenters with uncommon vehemence seems to have been lightly admitted as a charge indisputably proved, though unsupported by any more solid ground of conviction than vague surmise and personal invective. By the Test Laws, the Dissenters are ignominiously marked as men unfit to be trusted with any honourable or advantageous office, or a share even in the government of a corporate town; they are forbidden to indulge the wish, which every good citizen must naturally feel, to serve his country in any civil or military post for which his attainments fit him; their capacities for public employment are doomed to lie uncultivated and useless; the avenues of honest ambition are barred against them, and the conditions on which alone they can be opened are more degrading than the exclusion itself. Under this long proscription, the patience of the Dissenters was not wearied out; their affection to the Government, which, in this respect had treated them harshly, was not alienated. For fifty years they acquiesced in silence under the disgrace and disabilities of the Test Laws. At last, observing the more liberal spirit of this age, and the tolerant disposition which had been

But what was the object the clergy had in view when they summoned their laity to a public meeting? was it not most evidently to give circulation to a cry—"The church is in danger?" Did not their resolutions found the trumpet of alarm through the kingdom? Did they not defend by every art of sophistry, by every appeal to prejudice, by every possible exhibition of remote and uncertain consequence, a principle which makes every patriot blush for his country when he hears it mentioned.

And will the clergy of Birmingham have the effrontery to say that this was imitating the conduct of the Dissenters?

Did the Dissenters meet to encourage oppression, to prevent the worth of good citizens from being recognized? Did they meet to do all they could to excite prejudice against innocence, to furnish bigotry with argument to make intolerance bold and fix the foot of oppression still faster on the neck of desert?

Had the object of the general convocation of Dissenters, which the clergy pretend gave them so much alarm, been to snatch the mitre from the head of the metropo-

displayed by Parliament in their recent concessions to the Roman Catholics, and to their own ministers, they were encouraged to renew their humble requests, that the Test Laws might be repealed. But when their complaints were heard once more, they were not couched in sul-  
len or reproachful language; they were expressed with a respectful deference to parliament, yet with that decent firmness which freedom and conscious integrity will always inspire. Nothing prior or subsequent to their defeat has indicated a spirit of mutinous disaffection, or disobedience to the laws. After repeated denials of that equality of civil rights, to which every unoffending citizen has a just claim, they have ceased to importune parliament; they have retired from the bar of the legislature with the dignity of injured but patient men, who have learned to bear legal ignominy without dejection or unseemly irritation; who have resolved to await the slow revolution of public opinion, and relying on the rectitude of their cause, and the increasing influence of reason alone, still trust that their countrymen will at last grant them that justice which they have hitherto refused."

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litan, to tear away the episcopal bench from the upper house, drag their couches of preferment from beneath the recumbent side of each inferior dignitary, and abandon at once the numerous tribe of rectors, vicars, and curates, to poverty and famine, then the assembly of clergy and high-churchmen, met for the purpose of issuing sentiments of tyrannical controul, under the specious name of resolutions, and the dictates of a corporation policy, under the still more specious pretence of securing the established religion of the realm from innovations with which it was not even threatened, might have been excused by saying the Dissenters have set us the example.

This enquiry into the fact, is sufficient to shew the fallacy of the only shadow of argument the writers of the Reply have advanced in vindication of their very illiberal conduct respecting the repeal of the corporation and test acts.\*

\* Every disinterested person of understanding, will readily perceive and acknowledge that religious opinions have in fact very little, if any thing to do with political conduct. Neither virtue nor ability have any necessary connection with creeds and confessions of faith. Facts oblige us to acknowledge that an infidel may render a service to the state, which it shall not be in the power of an high-churchman to do, with all his zeal for the established religion of his country. And what kind of policy is that which shall permit a blundering ignoramus to bring destruction on the community, because he worships God according to act of parliament, and withhold a man of talent and superior virtue, from promoting its welfare, because he happens to disapprove of the artifices of the national church.

A test previous to a man's entrance upon any office of trust, is also idle, because it affords no additional security for his honesty afterwards. The true and only rational test is subsequent to this. Neither can the qualifications nor fidelity of any one, for any office, be gathered, but from the manner in which he acquits himself in its discharge *after* he has obtained it.

Sentiments of this nature are forcibly expressed in the following act, for establishing religious freedom, passed in the assembly, of Virginia in the beginning of the year 1786.

“ Well aware that almighty God hath created the mind free; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishment or burthens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy, and are a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, who being lord of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions

Having stated these particulars, which if the clergy can, I hope they will take the trouble of controverting; I shall leave the public to determine how far it will be just to ascribe, "all the ignorance, violence, and guilt of this proceeding to the clergy, and all the wisdom, temperance, and innocence of it to the Dissenters."

on either; that the impious presumption of legislators and rulers, civil as well as ecclesiastical (who being themselves but fallible and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinion and mode of thinking as alone true and infallible, and as such endeavouring to oppose them on others) hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world, and through all time; that to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical; that even the forcing a man to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion, is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor, whose morals he would make his pattern, and whose powers he feels most persuasive to righteousness, and withdrawing from the ministry those temporal rewards, which, proceeding from an approbation of their personal conduct, are an additional incitement to earnest and unremitted labours for the instruction of mankind; that our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, more than on our opinions in physics or geometry; that, therefore, the proscribing any citizen as unworthy the public confidence, by laying upon him an incapacity of being called to offices of trust and emolument, unless he profess or renounce this or that religious opinion, is depriving him injuriously of those privileges and advantages to which, in common with his fellow citizens, he has a natural right, and also to corrupt the principles of that very religion it is meant to encourage, by bribing, with a monopoly of worldly honours and emoluments, those who will externally conform to it; that though indeed those are criminal who do not withstand such temptations, yet neither are those innocent who lay them in their way; that to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion, and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency, is a dangerous fallacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty, because he, being of course judge of that tendency, will make his opinions the rule of judgment, and approve or condemn the sentiments of others, only as they shall agree with, or differ from his own; that it is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government, for its officers to interpose when principles break out in overt acts against peace and good order; and finally, that truth is great, and will prevail if left to herself; is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error; and can have nothing to fear from the conflict unless, by human interposition, disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate; error ceasing to be dangerous, when it is permitted freely to contradict them.

"Be it, therefore, enacted by the general assembly, that no man shall be compelled to support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever;



The Reply says, p. 50, "that Dr. Priestley's assertions respecting the shutting up of the work-shops, has not the countenance even of one solitary example." I warn Mr. Burn against his putting this, which I affirm to be a false assertion, into his next edition without consulting me, because I wish as much as possible, to avoid mentioning names, since, however strongly I may disapprove of the conduct of the clerical authors of the Reply, yet I have no quarrel with the laity.

Of the long story to which the landlord of the Hotel has been induced to subscribe his name, it is sufficient to say that the account it contains is far from being just. And if it were ever so true, the manner in which the writers of the Reply have treated Mr. Russell, is unpardonably gross and insolent. But before I advance any thing farther on this head, I call upon the writers of the Reply to come forwards with some other proofs more substantial than the mere assertions of Mr. Dadley; in particular, let them prove that either Mr. Russell or the company were in the state of perturbation the Reply insinuates, but dares not affirm. Let them prove, if they can, that the company retreated through the back door; for I maintain that the reverse of this is the fact, unless they can prove that by the

whatsoever; nor shall be forced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods; nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion; and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.

"And though we well know that this assembly, elected by the people for the ordinary purposes of legislation only, have no power to restrain the acts of succeeding assemblies, constituted with powers equal to our own; and that, therefore, to declare, this act irrevocable, would be of no effect in law; yet we are free to declare, and do declare, that the rights hereby asserted are natural rights of mankind; and that if any act shall be hereafter passed to repeal the present, or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural rights."

company

company we are only to understand two gentlemen that came from a distance, and went out at the back door as the readiest way to their horses. In proof of this, every individual of the company that dined may be appealed to, except the miscreant who, it was said at the time, was hired for the express purpose of insulting Dr. Priestley, had he dined there.

With his usual accuracy, Mr. Burn talks of the darkness of the night of the 14th of July, when it is very well known the day and night were remarkably clear, and the moon happened to be at the full. Nor can I think the clergy do any credit to themselves, as men of veracity, when they say, p. 61, "we profess ourselves happy in our ignorance of such men as are in the habit of drinking damnation to the Dissenters, and we express our unfeigned detestation of their communications:" for then they must profess themselves ignorant of one of our worthy magistrates, if not of both, and have written a book with a view to the vindication of a man whom they unfeignedly detest.\*

Mr. Burn has taken a great deal of pains to vindicate the clergy and magistrates of Birmingham. I will not

\* If I were to hint that the clergy notwithstanding the sacredness of their order, and that unfeigned detestation they express of the communications of those who drink damnation to Dissenters, might, if they were disposed to make enquiry, find evidence that some such toast has been given and drank by one if not more of their own body, the Rev. Replicants would cry out with Dogberry in the play, "Dost thou not suspect our place? Dost thou not suspect our function? We are wise fellows, and which is more we are officers, and which is more, as pretty pieces of flesh as any in England." The chief business it is said, and the highest praise of a teacher, is to render himself unnecessary—So far as any of the clergy of Birmingham thought it their province to instruct the people of that town in drinking toasts so pious as the one just referred to, I believe any one acquainted with the place will allow that in this respect farther instruction whether by precept or example, would be quite useless.

trouble you with long quotations from the Reply in my refutation of those parts of it which relate to the conduct of the gentlemen just mentioned, as that would only increase the bulk without increasing the value of the number. I shall therefore only lay before you a few facts, and leave it with yourselves to determine what weight the words, for they are nothing more, contained from p. 70 to 79 inclusive, ought to carry with them. The facts respecting the conduct of the magistrates which will be given in connection with those relating to the clergy, will enable you to judge whether the Doctor's suspicions, which have given so much offence to the minds of the writers of the Reply, be altogether without foundation. Mr. Burn in the course of his work, has made several attempts to defend and even to applaud the conduct of these gentlemen. I shall therefore content myself with confuting those parts of the Reply which relate to the conduct of the clergy and magistrates in the town, till I am called upon to be more particular, by stating to you the following

FACTS, *relative to the Conduct of the CLERGY and*  
MAGISTRATES *of the Town of BIRMINGHAM.*

Doctor Priestley, Appeal p. 73, very justly argues that if the clergy of Birmingham were conscious of innocence with respect to the facts committed by the rioters, and at the same time inwardly disapproved of their outrages, it was necessary, in order to clear themselves from all stain of guilt, that they should express, by some means or other, that disapprobation, and recommend to their hearers the cultivation of peace and moderation. And still farther, that if they had done something to alleviate or remedy the injuries the Dissenters had received, it would have redounded greatly to their honour. The clergy, assuming the tone of innocence, enquire, Reply p. 74, "what evidence Dr. Priestley has to produce that they have not done so."

This question will be answered to your satisfaction, my countrymen, by a few others, which I call upon the clergy of Birmingham to answer in the negative if they can; if they cannot, there is a proverbial expression importing, *silence gives consent*.

Will Mr. Curtis come forward and affirm there is no evidence that on the evening of Friday the 15th of July, 1791, and the second day of the riots; as the mob returned from the destruction of Mr. John Ryland's house, that a certain Reverend Divine harranged them at the top of Temple Street, in words to the following import, We thank you, my brave fellows, for the zeal you have shewn in behalf of the church and of the king; you have now sufficiently punished your enemies, and we beg you will disperse and go peaceably about your business?

When Mr. Curtis shall compliment the public with a more full account of his adventures during the riots, will he take an opportunity of denying the possibility of bringing evidence to prove that the same Reverend Gentleman was seen in the midst of the mob on the same 15th of July, opposite the Old Crown Inn, on horseback; that he stood up in his stirrups and gave several toasts for the mob to drink, that he gave the following with peculiar energy and glee; "Here's that place of worship we frequent, my boys, in opposition to all others?"

The mob, after having broke the windows of the Hotel, proceeded to the New Meeting, to which they set fire as soon as they had demolished the doors and windows. From thence they proceeded to the Old Meeting, which it was naturally expected they would serve exactly in the same manner. By the public spirit of a respectable member of the society assembling in that place, an effort was made to procure the town engines, in order to prevent the fatal consequences which might otherwise ensue, by setting fire to a building which



which was so furrounded with houfes, that it was impoffible to foretel where the mischief might end. That gentleman was directed to the beadle of St. Martin's, as the perfon who had the care of the engines. To this beadle, whose name is Jofeph Neale, the gentleman went, accompanied by feveral others. After fome knocking the beadle came, and was asked to take out the fire engine, and bring it into Old Meeting-ftreet, to be in readinefs if wanted, on account of the apprehenfions juft ftated. The reply of the beadle was, "I have not got the keys;" he was then asked what was become of the keys, he answered, "Mr. Brooke the clerk, has them." In confequence of this, the following questions were put to him. "Are not you the perfon appointed by the town to take care of the engines, and to live in this houfe to be in readinefs to get them out, and go with them at a minute's notice, whenever called for?" Mr. Jofeph Neale replied, "I was ordered to give them to Mr. Brooke." Upon being asked who ordered him, will the writers of the Reply be kind enough to tell me, or rather my fellow citizens and countrymen, why Mr. Jofeph Neale, the beadle, in the honefty of his heart, answered to this queftion, "Mr. Curtis."

The above-mentioned gentleman and his companions, then went to the houfe of S. Brooke, clerk of St. Martin's, in Moat-row; it then being between the hours of eleven and twelve o'clock. "Mr. Brooke I am come for the fire engines," faid he; S. B. in a very ftern tone of voice, replied, "I cannot deliver them," "why Mr. B." faid the gentleman, "you cannot be infenfible of what is going forward in the town; but I do not want the engines on account of the Meeting-houfes, for the New is by this time totally, and the Old in great part destroyed, but to ferve the inhabitants, by preventing the flames from the Old Meeting-houfe, spreading farther, and communicating to the adjoining houfes, for in fo confined a ftreet, if speedy affiftance be not given, God only knows what will be the confequence."

consequence." To this S. B. replied, with still greater warmth, "I cannot deliver them." Upon this the gentleman said, "I insist upon having them." The answer was, "I cannot deliver them without an order." "It is very extraordinary," the gentleman said, "that you cannot deliver them without an order; the town may be half burnt down before that can be had; from whom must you have the order?" S. B. answered, "from one of the church wardens." "Who are the wardens," enquired the gentleman. S. B. answered, "Mr. Clarke of Paradise-street, and Mr. Hammersley of Great-Charles-street." "What," said the gentleman, "must we then go near a mile for an order for the delivery of the engines before we can have them, while the flames are making such progress?" S. B. answered, "I cannot deliver them without an order." "Have you then received orders not to deliver the engines without a note from one of the wardens?" S. B. answered, "yes I have." The person who put these questions to him, then said, "take notice, Gentlemen, that Mr. Brooke says, he has been *ordered* not to deliver the engines without a note from one of the wardens." He and the rest of the gentlemen then went immediately to Mr. Clarke's, who, they were informed by a servant girl, was not at home. They then went to Mr. Hammersley, who expressed much surprise at being told that S. B. had refused to deliver the engines without his or Mr. Clarke's order, and immediately gave a note to the gentlemen for S. B. to deliver them. He then in company with some others returned to S. B.'s house, calling in their way upon Mr. Wallis, the constable, who, at their request, readily accompanied them. When the gentleman was arrived a second time, at the house of S. B. he said, "when I called upon you about an hour ago for the engines, you would not deliver them without an order from one of the wardens, I have got an order, will you deliver them now?" S. B. hastily replied, "have you got an order?" "Yes I have," said the gentleman, shewing it to S. B. "will you now deliver them,  
or

or will you not?" S. B. looking at the note, and at the same time stretching out his hand to take hold of it, (but the gentleman refused to part with it) said "I will." And then went into the house, as was supposed, to fetch the key, saying, "if you must have them, you shall; but they will do you no good when you have got them." He then went with the gentleman to the engine-house, and brought the engine into the street, when some persons, who were near the spot, assisted in conducting it towards the Old Meeting. Notwithstanding all this, it has since appeared that they proceeded but a little way up Edgbaston-street, and then returned without making any use of the engine. The gentleman, at the time the engine was bringing up, was taken hold of by the collar, by a person unknown to him, who said, "for God's sake do not go any farther; you are known, your name has been mentioned, and you will be knocked on the head if you stay." To which he replied, "I am not afraid, and since I have had so much trouble about the engine, I will see it set off:" and as soon as it began to move he returned home, which, to the best of his recollection, was between the hours of twelve and one o'clock.

The furliness of Mr. Brooke, when applied to for the keys, his surprize at the gentleman's obtaining an order, his desire to get that order into his possession, his reluctance in delivering them at last, I must leave the public to account for, and likewise to discover the reason why the beadle, whose proper office it was to keep the keys of the engine-house, should have received orders to give them to the clerk of St. Martin's just at that particular crisis: and why the clerk was ordered by his rector not to give them up till he was forced to it by an order from the church wardens.

As the public are but little acquainted with me, and I do not chuse to mention any more names than are necessary:

fary: it may not be amiss to corroborate this account, which, from the extraordinary nature of the facts related in it, will be thought very improbable from the voluntary testimony of a person, who, in this instance, cannot be suspected; this is no less a person than Mr. Curtis himself, who has obligingly favoured the public with some of the above circumstances in the following words. "About three o'clock," (*observe the time*) "on Friday morning, the 15th, a letter was sent me by my clerk, S. Brooke, dated St. Martin's vestry," (*observe the place*) "in which he informed me the meeting houses were set on fire by a mob, and that he had obeyed the orders of the church wardens, in delivering up the keys of the engines." See Reply, p. 87:

Mr Curtis's account, so far as it goes, perfectly agrees with that just given. People do not usually write letters at one o'clock in the morning, and much seldomer in the vestry of a church. The natural conclusion you will draw from these two accounts is, that S. Brooke had received such strict orders from Mr. Curtis, that he thought it necessary to dispatch an express at the early hour of one or two in the morning; it could not be much sooner, for it was between twelve and one before he went to the engine-house, and it would take him some time to write the letter and to procure a man and horse to carry it to Mr. Curtis at Solyhull, a distance of about seven miles, to apologize for his conduct in delivering up the keys; for otherwise what has the rector of Solyhull to do with the engines belonging to the town of Birmingham. And why did the clerk state that he had obeyed the orders of the church wardens, if he had not known that this was the only excuse the rector would admit. How could Mr. Curtis have received this letter so early as three, unless an express had been sent off on horseback for that purpose? And why should the information point particularly at the circumstance of delivering up the keys? Had this letter been written to desire Mr.

Curtis's



Curtis's advice or assistance upon such an emergency, it would have worn a better appearance. But as it now stands, what Mr. Curtis has written, affords an additional proof to every impartial person, that the keys had by his own orders been taken out of the hands of the person whose proper office it was to keep them, and delivered into the hands of Mr. Curtis's clerk, with strict orders to deliver them to no one, till he was compelled to do it by an order from the church wardens.

This same Mr. Curtis boasts, as an instance of uncommon charity, that his house was open to one Dissenter and his family during the time of the riots. But a doubt arises, if Mr. Curtis had been in the way when that Dissenter arrived, whether he would have found sanctuary so long as he did, for Mr. Curtis cannot deny, that he was soon after Mr. Curtis came home, given to know that his room would be more agreeable than his company.

What will not that man say, who boasts of generosity when he knows that an aged and respectable gentleman with whom he was well acquainted, was not suffered to remain within his walls in a time of danger.

Similar to this is his assertion, p. 90, respecting *the children* of another family, whom he affirms to have been "*literally cloathed* by Mrs. Curtis."—Dr. Parr seems to think that Mr. Curtis is not profoundly skilled in the Greek tongue,—I am sure he is very superficial in his knowledge of the English, otherwise he would not have applied the term "*literally cloathed*" to the lending the children of the most opulent man in the town, some necessary articles of apparel, which, if I am not misinformed, were returned without having been used.

It would seem to have been a point much laboured by the writers of the Reply, to make the riots appear to the public to have been occasioned, not by bigotry and malevolence,

malevolence, but by suspicions of sedition excited in the loyal minds of the populace by the licentious speeches of the Dissenters in general, and the writings of Dr. Priestley in particular, previous to those horrid events which will for ever blacken the annals of ninety-one.

The accusations of this nature are, however, couched in very cautious terms. These stabs at reputation are made in the dark. By not specifying the persons against whom these charges are brought, they have rendered the refutation of them difficult, and left themselves a passage through which to escape. Thus, beneath the thick covering of the night, the black assassin deals mischief around him, and concealed by the darkness, evades the pursuing hand of the avenger of blood.

Since Mr. Burn, in different parts of the Reply, has stated circumstances to prove that the speeches uttered by the Dissenters previous to the riots, were in some measure the cause of them; he is now required to do that which he ought to have done at the first, that is, to prove them to have been spoken at all at the time, and in the manner he has alleged, and then point out to the public how this could possibly have produced the effects he attributes to them, even upon the supposition they were uttered.

To be more particular, is Mr. Burn yet prepared to tell the world the name of that Dissenter who told the church-warden when he called for his levy, "You may take it for this time, but I think you will not have any more," Reply p. 60.

Mr. Burn states that this church-warden was severely censured by the party who made the above speech. If Mr. Burn would favour us with the names of the individuals concerned, which he tells us in italics, "are in our possession;" I have some reason to believe that I could prove the whole story to be entirely false.

When

When the gentleman, who had some reason to suspect that he was the person thus covertly defamed, took an opportunity of seeing Mr. Burn, and requested him to mention the names of the parties, why did Mr. Burn blush, why did he hesitate, why did he at length stammer out the lame apology "I am not prepared to do it;" or why did he publish to the world a circumstance (I use his own words) that was stated to him in such a style, that he did not know he could do it? Why did he hesitate and return no answer at all, when he was asked whether or not, one of the names was Witton? and when, in consequence of receiving no answer, the person who questioned him added, "if the name was Witton, the case mentioned in the Reply was false," why did he return the evasive answer, "If ever the question be again put to me as referring to Mr. Witton, I will say it is false?"

In No. IV. of the Appendix, p. 112, of the Reply, Mr. Burn has introduced a conversation-piece. A gentleman, very generally reported to have been one of the persons alluded to, unconscious of having uttered any such expressions as those mentioned in the above reference, waited upon Mr. Burn on the morning of the 4th of May, 1792, to enquire whether this was actually the case.

Why did Mr. Burn decline to say whether the conversation in question referred to this gentleman? and why would he not discover the name of his informer, and that too in a case which he prefaces with these words, "We received the following particulars signed by the gentleman who attests them, and who is ready, if necessary, to give the names of the parties alluded to with the *circumstances of the conversation upon oath?*"

It may not be improper to assure the public, that if the above-mentioned conversation, as published by Mr. Burn, does

does refer to the gentleman who made the enquiry, it is an unjust and false representation. That from no conversation in which that gentleman took part with any possible informer of Mr. Burn, could it, without the utmost perversion, ever be inferred that he entertained any hostile disposition towards the constitution or the king. He is, however, ready to acknowledge, that he avowed freely, and with pleasure, his intention of joining in the celebration of the French revolution, but denies that he did so in the words imputed to him (as is reported) by Mr. Burn's informer. He also readily acknowledges, something was said by the person he takes to be Mr. Burn's informer, on the morning of the 14th of July, (not by way of friendly caution) but in a very insulting and threatening manner, concerning the informer's forefight of the *impending punishment*. But he affirms that this part of the conversation, has likewise the misfortune to be falsely stated,—the notoriously virulent and tyrannical temper of the man, not suffering him to give any such friendly hints as he has reported. And it was impossible to regard any thing he really did say, any otherwise than as the empty bugbear of a little contemptible enemy of mankind, held out to gratify his own malevolent humour.

But has not Mr. Burn himself in his introduction to this conversation piece, made an unfortunate avowal of unfair dealing, when he tells us that the circumstances are not given? For what purpose are the circumstances withheld?

This gentleman relates a speech of the man he supposes to be Mr. Burn's informer, *with* the circumstances, which is a good specimen of the disposition generally entertained by the high church party.

“About noon on the 14th of July, 1791, I passed this person in the street. He called loudly after me, ‘So, you



you are going to the Hotel I find?"—I replied, "I intend to go;"—He then bawled out, 'I wish you were all blown up together.' I walked on without saying any thing more."

I agree with this gentleman that the conversation, even as related by Mr. Burn, does not serve his cause, and is not deserving of any notice, any otherwise than as it furnishes an amiable specimen of that gentleman's great candour, impartiality, and strict attention to truth.

Something sooner than five o'clock in the morning of the 15th of July, the mob were within the house of Dr. Priestley, employed in demolishing the inside of it, the greatest part of the furniture having been previously destroyed. Is there no evidence, that a certain clergyman of the established sect, was seen walking, about six o'clock, in Dr. Priestley's Laboratory, with several loose papers in his hand, one of which appeared to have been folded up as a letter? Is there no evidence that the aforesaid clergyman after reading the above-mentioned papers, attentively, rolled them up and put the papers in his pocket? And is there no reason to believe that those papers belonged to Dr. Priestley? Is it quite certain that nobody saw this same reverent gentlemen in the library within Dr. Priestley's house; did no eye observe him to select and read in that apartment letters and papers? Is there no reason to believe that some, at least, of these he took away with him? While this divine was in the garden at the front of the house, did no rioter with the familiarity of an acquaintance, offer him a book? And when he was in the back yard, did no unlucky intruder, see him collecting the papers or letters which had been thrown out of the library windows—reading them one after another, then folding them up and putting them into his pocket? If this can be clearly made out, to peeping Tom, and peeping Charles, may in due time be added, peeping Andrew.

E

I shall

I shall now proceed to shew you, that when Dr. Priestley preferred the serious charge of manifest remissness upon the Magistrates of Birmingham, that possibly it might be founded on a knowledge of facts in their conduct, fully justifying the imputation. And that possibly no fear of deficiency in point of proof has prevented the sufferers from proceeding against them *legally*, but the hope that government will enquire into the behaviour of those worthy gentlemen who have the care of the police of Birmingham, and in whose behalf our reverend champion has so valiantly wielded his pen. See Reply, p. 81.

Will this meek and wary Gentleman dare to tell you in a direct and manly form of expression, there is no evidence, that, in the afternoon of the 15th of July, 1791, when the Magistrates were both together at the Swan Inn, in Bull-Street, for the purpose of adopting measures for the suppression of the riots—during the time they were engaged in the administration of oaths to a number of persons, who declared their determinations to use their best endeavours to restore the public peace,—will he have the boldness to affirm, no evidence can be produced, that, while this business was going forward, Captain Maxwell entered the room, got near one of the justices, and informed him that if it met with his approbation, he would in a very short time engage to collect all the soldiers that were in town, would head them himself, and had no doubt of being able to put a speedy stop to the public depredations that were taking place? Is there no evidence that this justice of the peace turned from him with apparent strong marks of disapprobation in his countenance? Is there no evidence that a person who stood very near the justice, and was known to be acting in concert with him, observed to Captain Maxwell, “we have a plan we are executing, and we beg not to be interrupted?”

Will

Will Mr. Burn come forward and say there is no evidence that when fifteen or sixteen rioters with blue cockades in their hats, and armed with bludgeons, were met and asked where they were going---Is there no evidence that they replied they were going to the Wood-Row, to burn Mr. Carpenter's House according to orders from the justice. And when it was enquired of them, Why they should wish to burn the house of a good man? will Mr. Burn or Mr. Madan be at the trouble to account for their replying to this, in these words, "He may be a good sort of a man for ought we know, but we have the justice's orders, and down it shall come?"

When a gentleman, an inhabitant of the place, came to Birmingham, and informed the magistrates that a party of rioters had come by orders received, as they said, from the justices to burn his house down, and as he knew where to find these rioters, begged the favour of half a dozen light horse to secure them---Is there no evidence that his request was denied? And when he offered to take them without the assistance of the military, provided it met their approbation---Can no evidence be produced that their approbation was not given? Is there no evidence that this justice of the peace instead of performing, with becoming seriousness, his duty as a magistrate,---Is there no evidence of his asking the gentleman who made this application, the insulting question, "Do you know ever an honest Presbyterian about the Lickey?" When this gentleman properly remarked, "I do not come here to talk about religion, but with a wish to prove myself a good citizen, and think I am doing my duty by endeavouring to secure a set of lawless villains who are plundering the innocent inhabitants of the country---Is there no evidence that he was again insulted with the impertinent questions, "Were you at the Hotel on the 14th of July, what toasts did you drink there, &c." which these worthy and vigilant magistrates put to him, without giving him any farther redress?

Will any of the writers of the Reply tell the world no evidence can be produced, that one of these worthy magistrates went to the house of Mr. Hawkes of the Grove, on Saturday, July 23, 1791, at ten o'clock at night, in company with Nicholas Bond, Esq. in a chaise? Is there no evidence that the justice said in a very peremptory tone, "Mr. Hawkes, we are come to demand a sight of the papers you have in your possession belonging to Dr. Priestley:" with which Mr. Hawkes complied, saying, at the same time, "I suppose you know you are right in so doing?" Is there no evidence that the said justice of the peace asked Mr. Hawkes, what he had seen of them, and if there was not something respecting government, commerce, &c.? Is there no evidence that Nicholas Bond, Esq. said, "we will not take any of these papers away, but as to-morrow is Sunday, and it will hinder your business, I should be glad if you would put them together, and bring them to the Swan Inn, High-street, in the morning; we want them for the satisfaction of Mr. Chamberlain?" After Mr. Hawkes had agreed to this, let the well-informed Mr. Burn tell you what was the reason, why Tart, the thief-taker, was sent the next morning to tell Mr. Hawkes he must not bring the papers?

Will the writers of the Reply come forward in a body, and tell the public, there is no evidence that on the evening of the 14th of July, 1791, the magistrates of Birmingham were seen to stop near the Quaker's Meeting, in consequence of being overtaken by a number of disorderly and noisy people? That in consequence of some question put to the justices by these riotous persons, the justices said in reply:---"Ay, go and pull the Meeting down, and we'll protect you."

Is there no evidence that there was a profound silence observed during the time the rioters waited for an answer, so that every attentive person on the spot at that time, can be positive as to the words? Is there no evidence that  
instantly



instantly upon the justices having spoken the above words, there was a general cry among the mob, "To the New Meeting, and we shall be protected;" that a great multitude of people then went to the New Meeting, while the justices went the contrary way towards Snow-hill, and one of them being much intoxicated, was attended home by the servant of a White-smith?

Will the authors of the Reply say there is no evidence, that on the dreadful evening of the 14th of July, 1791, a reverend gentleman who acts in the double capacity of a minister and magistrate, idled away a quarter of an hour (an important space of time at such a crisis) on the steps of the Hotel in Temple-row? Or that when the mob attempted to enter the Hotel, this reverend doctor did not familiarly inform them—"they are gone;" and in such a manner as evidently to mean the gentlemen who had dined there? Or when some of the mob who had gone into the Hotel to search for the persons who had celebrated the revolution, came out again, will Mr. Burn say there is no evidence that the reverend magistrate huzzaed with them, but never in all that time made the smallest attempt to check them?

Is there no evidence that this same reverend gentleman, then in company with his brother in office, was seen between the hours of seven and eight o'clock on the 14th of July, 1791, in the middle of a mob collected between the church-yard of St. Philip's and Bull-street? Is there no evidence that these gentlemen in the act of passing from the Hotel towards Bull-street, surrounded by the mob, when they were opposite the Swan door in Temple-row, encouraged the mob by bowing and nodding to them? Though the gestures of one of them, on account of his stature, were not in this instance so visible as those of his reverend brother. Yet will Mr. Burn and his virtuous coadjutors, who are so entirely ignorant of what indivi-

“duals, calling themselves churchmen, may have said in “their hours of debauchery and intemperance\*,” dare to tell us, no evidence can be produced, that the reverend magistrate exhibited the most unequivocal external signs of being intoxicated with liquor?

Will they tell you there is no evidence, that when a gentleman, whose house was in danger from the rioters, went for assistance to the justices on the 18th of July, 1791, those justices instead of seriously attending to his request, began to question him about things quite foreign to the purpose, as whether he was at the Hotel on the 14th of July, what toasts he drank, &c.? And when in answer to this last question, among several others, he mentioned the King as one, the Justices said, We do not believe it—when he still persisted in affirming the King to have been one of the toasts, and upon their requisition consented to swear it, is there no evidence that this reverend magistrate offered him a Bible for that purpose, but finding the gentleman perfectly willing to take his oath in confirmation of what he said, is there no evidence that the Doctor’s heart failed him, that he suddenly changed his mind, and put the book down? If there is, the public will not only think that the worthy magistrates of Birmingham, have capacities admirably adapted to their situation, and a mode of giving redress and affording protection superior in excellence to that which the generality of mankind would think proper on an occasion so very alarming, but will perhaps be led into a notion that such an affidavit would not have answered their purpose.

Will the writers of the Reply affirm there is no evidence that this same reverend personage was present at the gates, if not within the court-yard, of Mr. John Ryland, at a time when a single man drove with his own unassisted

\* Reply, p. 61.

arm, all the rioters out of the house of Mr. Ryland, without making any effort to disperse the mob? And is there no evidence that Mr. John Ryland's house might at that very instant have been saved, provided the magistrates had been disposed to act in good earnest? Instead of the mob being discouraged, or awed by the presence of this reverend divine and his brother in office, Is there no evidence that they were not inspired and rendered more active in their riotous proceedings?

Many of you, my countrymen, have no doubt, heard the conduct of the magistrates of Birmingham commended in a high and triumphant strain of panegyric. There have not been wanting people ignorant or infatuated enough to enumerate with lavish praise the effects of the wisdom they exercised in the formation of their plans, of their uncommon vigilance, incessant labour, and pitiable fatigue in executing them. It might have been expected, however, that the writers of the Reply would have exercised a little more of that cautious prudence, of which it must be allowed every page of their pamphlet exhibits a share so great as to tempt one to infer a defect in that article, which on such an occasion would have stood them in stead when their ingenuity failed them—and not have added to the curiosity which such extravagant eulogies excite, to inspect more closely the conduct, talents, and characters of those on whom they are profusely bestowed. The public will, I trust, be convinced that instead of pushing these gentlemen forward into the strongest light, and assigning them a place so very conspicuous, it would have been wise to have thrown them into the back ground, and as much into the dark shades of the piece as possible.

In fine, my Countrymen, with respect to the magistrates, I have reasons quite satisfactory for thinking, they neither wished nor attempted to disperse the mob when first collected before the door of the Hotel. So notorious

is this fact, that I cannot suppose either of them would, in the hour of temperance, seriously deny it. Nay, I will not exhibit them as characters so utterly destitute of all regard to truth as to affirm them capable of declaring, they did not by their words and actions encourage it at the outset. What Mr. Burn in the heat of his zeal to vindicate the men he loves, affirms *for* them, is one thing, what they, when properly brought to the test, will affirm *themselves* with respect to this affair, is another.

I confess it would to me afford a high gratification, to have the experiment made. I should be delighted with an opportunity of hearing what Mr. Carles, with a spirit solemnized by the presence and forms of a court of judicature, instead of being elevated with the inspiring draughts of Bacchus, would say to a man, who having heard him drop the expressions should ask him, Whether, when he was at the door of the Hotel at the time when the mob first assembled there on the evening of the 14th of July, he did not address them in expressions similar to the following, "The gentlemen who dined are all gone—" —dont hurt Dadley, he is an honest little fellow, who "gets his bread by making public dinners; but I am as "true a man for church and king as the best of you;" and whether he did not upon this, immediately take off his hat, and huzza with the rioters, "*Church and King for ever?*"

It would give me pleasure to hear what Dr. Spencer, in a similar situation to that in which for argument's sake, I took the liberty of supposing his brother in office—would say, if he were narrowly questioned, Whether, when he came to Dr. Priestley's house on Friday morning, and found the acting constable of Deritend, and the man of all others the most fit to be employed in securing offenders, exerting himself to put a stop to the violent proceedings of the rioters, Whether Dr. Spencer would seriously affirm and say, "I applauded him for his fidelity  
"and



“and boldness; I encouraged him in his endeavours to suppress the riot, and ordered him to apprehend any of the mob collected there, and all of them if he could.” Or on the other hand, would Dr. Spencer in such circumstances deny, that he reprimanded him for being there by the angry tone in which, upon finding the constable so properly employed, he pronounced the following question, “*What brings you here?*”

Or, if upon being applauded by their panegyrical volunteer, the Rev. Mr. Burn, for their unexampled vigilance and perpetual residence on the spot—their valiant occupation at all times of the post of greatest danger, they should be questioned by the gentleman who had to go several miles to call them up, where, and when, and with what difficulty, he roused them from their iron-slumbers? it might prevent them from being corrupted by too much praise\*.

I shall conclude this section with asking, in the language of Mr. Grey, when supporting the motion of Mr. Whitbread to institute an enquiry into the conduct of these worthy gentlemen, “How have the rioters been punished? of many thousands, twenty have been apprehended, five convicted, and three executed. These were the victims among the deluded *instruments*, while the

\* The reverend writers of the Reply will perhaps be more moderate in the praises they shall hereafter bestow upon the astonishing watchfulness, anxiety and activity for the public good, which they would appear to have thought so conspicuous in the conduct of the Birmingham justices throughout the whole of this business, when they shall be informed that the very same magistrates, whose fatigue Mr. Curtis so pathetically mentions in the course of that agreeable account with which he has favoured the public, of his dressing, ordering his *own* carriage, treating a gentleman with a ride in it, then ordering his saddle-horse, and then his servant, and then of his being waited on by Mr. Taylor—I say, when they shall be informed of what they ought not to have been ignorant, namely, that Dr. S. and Mr. C. the justices, after the excessive labour they had undergone in walking to and fro among the mob on the night of the 14th of July, 1791, on the morning of Friday the 15th, about one o'clock, quietly retired each to his

*authors* are suffered to escape. If the affidavits are true, the *magistrates* are the *authors*—and for the honour, the justice, and the peace of the country, ought to be called to a rigorous account\*.”

The writers of the Reply despairing to find any other eulogists, have undertaken the difficult task of praising themselves. How far they are entitled to those eulogies they have bestowed upon themselves, I shall leave the public to judge from what I have already related, and from a circumstance or two, which yet remain to be noticed.

Will Mr. Curtis come forward and tell the public, that I have no evidence to prove, that one of their own body, in the evening of the second day of the riots, did not join the mob as they returned from the destruction of Mr. Ryland's house, and harangue them at the end of one of the public streets in words of the following import, “*We thank you, my brave fellows, for the zeal you have shewn for the church and the king, you have now sufficiently punished your enemies, and we beg you will disperse and go peaceably about your business?*” And will he therefore argue that this is not a proper specimen of their conduct during the riots?

Will Mr. Curtis tell us that the effect produced by such a mode of behaviour towards the mob justified a perseverance in it? Will he tell me I can produce no evidence, that when a certain clergyman came up to the

his respective country seat (whether on saddle-horses or in their *own* carriages, I shall leave Mr. Curtis to determine) and left the mob to dispose of the town as it thought proper.

If they doubt of this, let the replicants ask the magistrates, Whether they themselves are of opinion that I can produce no evidence of their being called out of their beds, at their own houses in the country, about three o'clock on Friday morning, July 15, 1791.

\* Parliamentary Chronicle, vol. v. p. 861.

rioters assembled before the house of one of the sufferers, passed into the midst of them, took off his hat, and huzzaed, "*Church and King*,"—that the mob who before seemed irresolute and inclined to depart, upon being told by one of their leaders, "that is our signal," (meaning the shouts and twirling-hat of the divine) immediately returned to the charge, and began the attack?

Will Mr. Curtis come forward and tell us there is no evidence, that the same individual servant of the Prince of Peace, who was so gentle and meek in his treatment of the mob, on the first Sunday after the riots had subsided, preached a sermon so inflammatory, as to occasion several very respectable members of his own congregation to censure its violence; and one of them to observe, that "though he went to worship with such dispositions as christianity requires in its professors, had he in consequence of the discourse determined to act upon the principles recommended in it, he should have come away a ruffian?" And would he have me adduce this as an acknowledgment of his having adopted a less bigotted spirit after having seen to what terrible excesses that spirit led?

Smooth expressions are made use of in the Reply to soothe the Dissenters, and attempts are made to flatter them, yet the mask sometimes slips aside, and we discover, in spite of their utmost care, the harsh features of the same unrelenting bigotry\*.

\* With how much propriety might Dissenters address many of their high-church seeming friends, in the language of the poet, and exclaim,

O dissembling courtesy! How fine these tyrants  
Can tickle where they wound! *Shakespeare.*

Or in the beautiful but more diffuse manner of the elegant Metastasio,

Io giurerei  
Che fra' pochi non sei tenaci ancora  
Dell' antica onestà. Quando bisogna,  
Saprai sereno in volto

Vezzeggiare

The only thing like shame that I have been able to discover in the conduct of the clergy of Birmingham, took place about a fortnight since. Mr. Young, whom I have always considered as one of the most candid of the ecclesiastics, was so confounded at being asked to accompany Mr. Scholefield to a funeral, that, after hesitating a moment or two, he said, "the clergy of Birmingham have come to a general agreement not to ride or walk with Dissenting ministers to funerals again."—Which answer, with Mr. Young's leave, I thus paraphrase,—*"We are so much ashamed of the part we have acted, that we dare not look a Dissenting minister in the face, and as we are not likely to meet with them any where except at funerals, we have come to a resolution of never meeting them again, even on occasions of that nature \*."*

Vezzeggiare un nemico : acciò vi cada,  
 Aprirgli innanzi il precipizio, e poi  
 Piangerne la caduta : offrirti a tutti,  
 E non esser che tuo : di false lodi  
 Vestir le accuse, ed aggravar le colpe  
 Nel farne la difesa : ognor dal trono  
 I buoni allontanar : d' ogni castigo  
 Lasciar l' odio allo scettro, e d' ogni dono  
 Il merito usurpar : tener nascosto  
 Sotto un zelo apparente un empio fine ;  
 Nè fabbricar che su l' altrui ruine.

\* From such truly enlightened and liberal behaviour of the clergy of Birmingham, it doubtless arises, that those who belong to their respective flocks, and look up to them for example, entertain such false ideas of Dissenters, and exhibit so much bitterness against them in their words and actions. To such of the high church party as are conscious of deriving their dislike to their fellow citizens from no other source, I recommend the study of the following definitions.

"DISSENTERS are protestants differenced from each other by different modes of worship, and forms of discipline ; but generally concurring in asserting the supremacy of their Lord and master Christ, in religious concerns, in opposition to the claims of fallible men." To which may be added—They contribute as much to the expences of an established religion, the service of which they cannot in conscience attend, as those who are its professed believers, while at the same time, they defray out of their own purses every expence incurred by that mode of worship they chuse to adopt.

"THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND-MAN, is a sectarist, partly papist, partly protestant. He is a protestant because he asserts the sufficiency of the scriptures. He is a papist because he in the same breath, requires



Upon the whole, we cannot believe that any man or body of men, will praise voluntarily and with ardour what they do not approve. The writers of the Reply have certainly done this with respect to the magistrates of Birmingham, from this circumstance alone you will justly conclude, that whatever conduct those magistrates observed, whatever spirit actuated them, the same spirit was cherished, and allowing for difference in situation, the same candour was observed by those of the clergy who contributed to the formation of the Reply. Their usual discretion has in this instance forsook them, and not contented with silent approbation and indirect encouragement, they have shamelessly come forward, and loudly applauded what nothing can excuse.

That the men whose blindness led them to publish sermons which would stamp the infamy of intolerance on more respectable names than those of Croft and Madan, should disclaim bigotry, is not more wonderful than that they should think the best way of quelling a mob was to bow to them, give them toasts, drink with them, huzza with them, and address them by the endearing appellation "*of friends and fellow-churchmen.*" Of this last measure they have set up a defence; the futility of which will appear to every reader, who shall observe that what it is principally grounded upon, is the circumstance of their having consulted three respectable Dissenters, who it seems

quires assent to certain additions to those scriptures. He is a protestant, because he has separated from the church of Rome upon the plea of the right of private judgment. He is a papist, because he refuses the same liberty of separation to his brethren. He is a protestant, because he maintains the unrighteousness of persecution, when he is himself the sufferer. He is a papist, because when opportunity offers he has always shewn himself a persecutor in his turn. The church of England clergyman also is a papist, because in his liturgy is found the Athanasian creed. He is a protestant, because though enjoined by temporal and spiritual authority to recite it monthly, he hardly ever reads it. He is a papist, because he subscribes to the thirty-nine articles; and he is a protestant because he does not believe them."

*Every Man his own Priest, No 15, Jebb.*  
consented

consented to their doing *that* rather than *nothing*. A person not interested in the business, might wonder at their effrontery in consulting the persons their negligence had so much injured, when the minds of those persons must have been in a state of confusion and alarm; but this is nothing to the meanness of throwing the odium which arose from the feebleness and folly of the measure upon persons so situated. But those who are too proud to confess an error, are generally base enough to cast the blame of it, however just, upon any the most innocent, rather than acquiesce in it themselves. And after all, when was this done, at what period of the riots was this measure adopted? It was not till the Saturday morning the third day of the riots, when the Dissenters had comparatively little to lose, and churchmen began to think themselves in danger, that this method was contrived. How happened it that it was not thought of on Thursday evening, Friday morning, or Friday night? All the good deeds of the clergy and magistrates towards the Dissenters have the misfortune to bear date after the mischief, and lie open to the suspicion of being prompted by self-love.

It appears to have been the wish of the high church party to impress the public mind with the idea that the tumult, rapine, and conflagration of ninety-one, was only the sudden and *improper* expression of the just indignation of an insulted people, against a set of persons of a particular description of religious opinion, on account of the hostility those persons cherished against the church, and the present constitution as consisting of king, lords, and commons.

It is therefore incumbent on me to put the public in possession of some facts and circumstances which will not permit us to believe those depredations unpremeditated. The disturbances in Birmingham did not originate in the ill-treatment of those who fomented them. It was not a sudden

sudden effervescence of popular fury, nor the mad and momentary impulse of intoxication. The mind was excavated by degrees, the combustible materials were gradually supplied, the explosion was instantaneous and unforeseen by those only whom cool malice had marked out as the devoted victims of its vengeance.

Will those who have stepped forward to tell the nation that whatever was done to excite the fury of the rabble was done by Dissenters, and that high churchmen both before, during, and after the riots, spoke no word, performed no action, that was not of a tendency entirely pacific? Will they come forward and deny that on the two days immediately preceding the 14th of July, many virulent threats were uttered by the high church party? That some thousand printed copies of a letter signed, "*Tatham*," pretended to be originally sent from Oxford, were by the party distributed gratis? That many were left in the public houses of Birmingham, and produced the effect which might naturally be looked for from its circulation at that particular crisis?

Is there no evidence that persons were stationed at the door of the Hotel to endeavour to irritate by personal insults, the gentlemen who went to the dinner? Is there no evidence that the plan seemed to be disconcerted, by the mob finding the company gone when they first began to indulge themselves in violence?

Were not the men who first broke into the New Meeting, observed to proceed immediately to work, in perfect silence, and with all the regularity of persons employed for the purpose?

Is it not well known that the rioters were provided with a list of the buildings which were to be demolished, set down in regular order, and those which were devoted  
to

the flames distinguished from those which were only to be dismantled?

Is it not notorious that persons went before the mob and marked the houses which were to be their prey? Can it not be proved that some persons being observed writing upon a building at a distance from Birmingham, and the mob not coming so soon as was expected after the departure of those persons who, immediately rode off; the people who had observed what they were doing, had the curiosity to go up to the building, and seeing it chalked on every side with, "*to be burnt to ashes*," or words of similar import, washed them out? Is there no evidence that when the mob came up they walked round the building exclaiming "this should be the house," &c. but not being able to discover the marks, departed with execrations, leaving the building untouched? Why were not the accustomed means of quelling a riot made use of at the first? How is it to be accounted for that the riot act was never read in any period of the business? Those whose office made this easy precaution their duty, cannot in this instance plead forgetfulness; they must know they were reminded by repeated importunities.\* Why did not the magistrates exert their authority at the door of the Hotel, and insist upon the immediate dispersion of the comparatively few then assembled, at a time when a few resolute words would have dispersed them? Why did they address them in a style of so curious a nature, as to make the mob believe that whatever the magistrates might say in *words* they meant in *fact* to authorize and protect them.

\* The precaution of reading the riot act, which most unpardonably was *not* taken to protect your houses of worship and your dwelling houses, has been taken very seasonably for the protection of Brothel-houses. The military force, which in consequence of proper information given in proper time to proper persons, ought to have been on the spot to prevent the riots in July, 1791, fortunately *was* at hand to suppress the riots of May, 1792. *Parr's Irenopolis*, p. 6.

Since



Since from the little traits of character and unpremeditated actions, the temper, disposition, and peculiar complexion of the mind of an individual is better comprehended than from the large features and the more important and studied parts of conduct, so perhaps the following casual expressions, may enable us to form a more accurate judgment of the state of the public mind in the period to which these letters refer, than the most elaborate research of argument. If I am wrong in this opinion, I am at liberty in the present instance to console myself with having erred with the wise and prudent writers of the Reply.

One gentleman, some time before the riots, affirmed that government would let the Dissenters go on for a few months longer, and then would do something decisive. July 13, 1791, in a company consisting of about fourteen persons, a conversation took place concerning the then intended dinner at the Hotel in Birmingham. Some gentlemen from London supported the propriety of it on the principle of rejoicing that so many of our fellow-creatures had been released from the yoke of despotism. A clergyman argued on the contrary side, and after the departure of the gentleman from London said, "these last might do as they pleased, but if there was any dining at the Hotel, in Birmingham, the next day, for the purpose of commemorating the French revolution, something would shew itself at night, and it was then brewing."

About twelve o'clock at noon on Friday the memorable fifteenth of July, 1791, while the Earl of Aylesford was talking to some of the rioters at Mr. Madan's door in St. Philip's Church-yard, a gentleman in company with another, was standing at the distance of about thirty yards from his lordship, when his companion left him for a few minutes, to mix among the mob, and upon his returning said, "I know three or four of the

F

"ring-leaders

“ring-leaders of the rioters, and I think if I were to speak to them, Carr’s-lane Meeting-house will be very safe.” The gentleman (who is a Dissenter, and a member of Carr’s-lane Meeting) replied, ‘I despise the idea of asking a favour at the hands of a mob, and they may go and pull it down if they please.’

The same churchman, in conversation with the above mentioned gentleman, on Wednesday the 13th of July, 1791, reprobated the idea of the intended dinner at the Hotel, and among other things of less importance said, “I have fifty hands in my shops (pointing with his hand towards them) and if I was to go to them to-morrow, and say, My lads, your church and king are in danger, they would turn out every man of them, and break every window in the Hotel.”

After the riots a person was called on, and his subscription asked for the defraying the expences incurred in keeping the mob from plundering houses. The person enquired if the expences of seeing counsel were not included? He was answered, they were, and likewise for saving the lives of the prisoners at Warwick. This person then replied, You have done an essential injury to society, by getting off a set of thieves who have been a pest to the community, and therefore I will not subscribe any thing towards it.

It was mentioned by some gentlemen on Tuesday the 8th of May, 1792, to an inhabitant of St. Paul’s Square, that a report was current, that shortly after the trials of the rioters, some persons had called upon him, requesting him to subscribe towards defraying the expences incurred by their defence; he replied, The report is true; there were two persons who called upon me, who had in their possession a long list of the names of those who had contributed, some of whom had given a guinea, and others half  
a guinea.

a guinea. I myself refused to subscribe. One of the above mentioned insisted upon it, observing that he had an account open with me, and I should at least contribute one half guinea. I as warmly persisted in my refusal; and added, that I would, with pleasure, at any time, give him two guineas, or walk forty miles, to see all the rioters hanged.

On the 15th July, 1791, between the hours of ten and one, a gentleman of the better, that is to say, of the richer sort, said to some men that were standing with him, "We are satisfied with what is done: and now I wish they would give over."

A respectable Dissenter was at the door of an inhabitant of St. Paul's Square, on Saturday afternoon, July the 16th, 1791, in company with several others. Their conversation was concerning the rioters, and the houses they were then employed in pulling down. These persons appeared much pleased at what was going on. Dr. Priestley was mentioned as the author of the inflammatory handbill. The inhabitant of St. Paul's Square said, "Damn him (meaning Dr. Priestley) it is a pity but he had been hanged nine years before he came to Birmingham."

A Dissenter was relating to a clergyman of the town of Birmingham, the circumstance of his servant being in the market-place, soon after the riots, and hearing one man say to another, "Well, if any person is hanged for it, the king may fight for himself another time if he will, for I am sure no body else will fight for him"—the clergyman said, it put him in mind of a conversation he heard at the Old Meeting, at the time the rioters were demolishing it. One said to another, "This is not right to do in this manner," the other replied, "Well, but the king has sent us word, if we do not do it, that he shall lose his crown."

Did it not argue at least approbation of the measure in a clergyman who possesses a considerable living in this part of the country, to say, that the Birmingham riots had done more towards the support of the established church, than any other thing that could be done, as they placed it hereafter above the fear of danger?

The lady of a Birmingham clergyman was heard, in a moment in which truth is least liable to be disguised, to say, "I wonder the mob should think of coming to destroy our house; they will be fools to do that, since they will *be so well paid* for their trouble."

"As for Dr. Priestley," says a clergyman who had been busily employed on the 15th of July, in haranguing the mob upon the prosperity of the town, the needlessness of a change, &c. "if I saw the mob going to *kill* him, I should endeavour to save him;" but expressed no displeasure at the fate of his house and laboratory.

"They say that Dr. Priestley wants to be king, and that he wants the methodists to join him," said a poor ostler to a gentleman who was a stranger, upon being asked the meaning of all the disturbance in town.

In a large company, a lady of the established church was heard to say, "I very often laugh to think what a figure our three Dons would cut, one in a waggoner's frock, another with his face blacked, and the third with his hair cropped." This masquerade will perhaps tend to take off the edge of Mr. Burn's satire, p. 48, of the Reply. And I advise him, if he has any regard for the reputation of those respectable characters, for whom he is so disinterestedly concerned, to blot out from his copies, by apology or advertisement, or some other way, that laboured hypothesis which he has drawn up with so much malignant ingenuity, in p. 48, of his reply. Let him be ware lest the habit of  
a waggoner



a waggoner, or the dress of any other character most remote from their own, should be found to have fitted some of his very respectable and worthy friends.

The reverend replicants have spent two pages in quibbling upon an expression of Dr. Priestley, and in taking leave (not in the most handsome manner) of their "friends and fellow churchmen" the rioters. The reader will already have concluded, that this was not the expectation of the poor deluded wretches at the time when a clergyman or a magistrate could drink or huzza with them. The clergy however appear, from a passage in Mr. Grey's speech, to have been faithful in their attachment to their humble friends longer than is usually the case in alliances of a similar nature. 'The approbation of the people of Birmingham,' said that gentleman, 'is but a feeble argument in favour of the magistrates. From the vehement spirit of persecution excited there, their *misconduct* is more likely to obtain approbation than a faithful discharge of their duty. As a proof of that spirit, it was reported on such strong presumption as fell little short of proof, that *a letter had been written, intended to be sent in the name of the clergy of Birmingham, to the judges, praying them to let the law take its course on some of the rioters, whose object was only plunder, but to deal mercifully with the rest, who had acted on PURE, though perhaps mistaken motives.*'

The replicants have taken great pains to make it appear that the dinner was the principal cause of the riots—If they should ever write a history of Rome, we shall find them assigning the feeding or fasting of a consul's chickens as the principal cause of a defeat or a victory. But surely there is a difference between a cause and an occasion. The dinner was only the season in which the causes of the riots operated. The meeting of two clouds may be the occasion of thunder, but that which causes the thunder is the lightening (philosophers will excuse my using language so

unscientific) with the materials of which the clouds are previously charged. In short, there seems to be no circumstance in which the penetrating ingenuity of the authors of the Reply have been able to find cause of blame against the Dissenters in the business of the dinner, but that of their not having been able to foresee future events.

That there were persons who knew what the Dissenters were entirely ignorant of, is evident enough. Suppose the writers of the Reply to have possessed that foreknowledge, what measures did they take to inform the Dissenters of it? Dadley was frightened; but it does not appear that he was trusted with names. Not those who could not *foresee*, but those who *foreseeing*, would not *prophecy*, are to blame in this affair.

Had the Dissenters apprehended the consequences, would they not have come armed to the dinner? Instead of separating, and forming parties of pleasure, must they not have been mad, not to have assembled together to concert measures for flight, or for mutual defence? But the fact was, every thing remained in perfect peace for hours after the dinner. The report of a riot was considered and treated as a joke; every one congratulated the other that it had passed over in such perfect peace as to prove that there had been no foundation for the hints that had been thrown out, and many would not believe the reports which were circulated after the rioters had begun their depredations, till their own eyes and the rising flames convinced them.

Besides, my Countrymen, which party has been desirous of setting an enquiry on foot? who are they that earnestly wish to have the whole affair searched to the bottom? And by whose influence was the enquiry quashed? Who is it that is afraid of affronting the mob of Birmingham, lest undeceived by rigorous proceedings some individuals should be irritated to blab? The clergy  
have

have indeed talked plausibly ; we shall, I hope, soon see what they have to say for themselves.

It is still hoped, that government will soon act in such a manner as to satisfy the public, that every citizen, of every religious persuasion, will receive on every future occasion the protection or punishment of the law.

What Mr. Fox said in the house on the subject of the the King's speech, is surely weighty and deserving of attention.—‘ It must have been owing to the unwillingness  
‘ of ministers to damp the pleasure arising from so many  
‘ topics of satisfaction as the speech from the throne contained, that with the mention of the inestimable blessings  
‘ of liberty, and order, they had introduced no expressions  
‘ of regret and concern at the violent interruption of order  
‘ that had occurred in the course of the summer. Nothing,  
‘ surely, but extreme reluctance to cast the least shade over  
‘ so many subjects of rejoicing, could account for such an  
‘ omission. To read his Majesty's speech one would imagine that nothing had happened to disturb the long experience of liberty and order so earnestly recommended  
‘ as the foundation of all our other blessings. But the  
‘ cautious omission could not conceal the evil; it was  
‘ impossible not to know, and not to lament, that towards  
‘ the close of the eighteenth century, men, instead of following in the progress of knowledge and liberality, had  
‘ revived the spirit and the practice of the darkest and most  
‘ barbarous ages, and that outrages the most unparalleled  
‘ and disgraceful had been committed—disgraceful, he meant, to the country, not to the Ministers. They, it  
‘ was to be presumed, had done every thing in their power  
‘ to prevent and to check such detestable proceedings.  
‘ But whether or not they, and those who acted under  
‘ them, had exerted themselves as they ought in repressing the devastations of a mob, at all times mischievous,  
‘ but doubly so when it assumed the pretext of supporting  
‘ government

‘government or religion, was it not melancholy to see that  
‘mob reigning triumphant for near a week in a rich and  
‘populous part of the country, and those, whose duty it  
‘was to have denounced the rigour of the law, addressing  
‘them rather in terms of approbation than rebuke? Was  
‘not this calculated to cherish an idea which but too fa-  
‘tally appeared to have been entertained, that the principle  
‘on which they pretended to act was not disagreeable to  
‘government, however necessary it might be to punish a  
‘few for the irregularity of their proceedings? He accused  
‘ministers of neither holding nor favouring such opinions.  
‘But when it could not be dissembled that such opinions  
‘had been held, if not inculcated, it would have been well  
‘if his Majesty had spoke of such riots, and their pretext,  
‘with horror, and of the exertions made to suppress them,  
‘and punish both the authors, and the actors, with ap-  
‘probation.—These were not riots for want of bread—  
‘such every feeling heart must pity while it condemned.—  
‘Neither were they riots in the cause of liberty, which,  
‘though highly blameable, and highly to be reprobated by  
‘every good man, and every good friend to liberty, had  
‘yet some excuse in their principle.—No, they were the  
‘riots of men neither aggrieved nor complaining, but  
‘who pretended to be the Executioners of Government,  
‘who did not select individual objects of party animosity, or  
‘private hatred, but by personal insult, violence, and fire,  
‘set on foot an indiscriminate persecution of an entire de-  
‘scription of their fellow citizens, that had furnished per-  
‘sons as eminent, as good subjects, and as zealous sup-  
‘porters of the Family on the Throne, as any other  
‘the kingdom could boast. Instead of passing over such  
‘acts in silence, ought not his Majesty’s sentiments to have  
‘gone forth as a manifesto, applying to them every epithet  
‘vituperative and expressive of abomination, which the lan-  
‘guage could furnish? When men were found so deluded  
‘as to suppose that their general object was not disagree-  
‘able to Government, a belief certainly unfounded, it  
‘might



' might do much more mischief than ministers are aware  
 ' of. He had supposed that all practicable measures were  
 ' taken to put a stop to those riots, and to punish those con-  
 ' cerned in them as an example to others; but after they  
 ' had threatened the person, and destroyed the house of a  
 ' man, distinguished by a life attached to literature, and  
 ' useful science, of Dr. Priestley, whom he named but to  
 ' honour, when they had destroyed all the accumulated  
 ' labours of his youth, when they had demolished, what  
 ' neither money nor industry could replace, that which  
 ' ought to have been the solace and ornament of his age,  
 ' then came from those whose rank and stations ought to  
 ' have given them influence, the slow desire to desist.  
 ' How was this desire expressed, and how was reprobated a  
 ' conduct, subversive of every principle of civilized society?  
 ' *Friends and Fellow Churchmen! We know you by the crosses*  
 ' *and banners you bear. You have now done enough in this*  
 ' *pious cause. What farther you do, you and we, your friends,*  
 ' *must pay for. Your farther exertions might be laudable,*  
 ' *but they would be too expensive.* If holding such degrading  
 ' language to a riotous mob could prevent mischief till  
 ' assistance arrived—If it could save a house from the  
 ' flames, much more a life, perhaps the sense of strict  
 ' propriety might yield without blame, to the immediate  
 ' impulse of compassion; but if neither of these was done,  
 ' how contemptible! If they who held it were now  
 ' ashamed of it, so much the more was it incumbent upon  
 ' them and Government, to do away the impression it  
 ' might have made, and to declare their abhorrence of acts,  
 ' which they, in a moment of weakness, seemed not to dis-  
 ' approve. He hoped, therefore, that if any opportunity  
 ' offered, this would still be done; and he had insisted on  
 ' it the more largely, that he thought an occasion might  
 ' not offer of noticing it in Parliament again. *See Star,*  
 ' *Wednesday, February 1, 1792.*

From the perusal and attentive consideration of what I  
 have here written, I am persuaded, my countrymen, that  
 you

## LETTERS TO

you will no longer consider the Dissenters as the cause of the Birmingham riots. It is our wish to exculpate ourselves from the charges insinuated against us by the clergy in the Reply to Dr. Priestley Appeal. I say insinuated, for they dare not in a manly, open, and fair manner, come forward and say, " You were the persons who wrote and distributed inflammatory letters, signed a Button-bur-nisher. You preached inflammatory sermons in your pulpits. You accused your brethren of the establishment without giving them an opportunity of clearing themselves. You hired persons to jostle against and insult them as they went to a public dinner, and afterwards to burn their houses. Some of your principal men disguised themselves, and mingled with the dregs of the people. You encouraged a lawless mob to attack the churches and houses of the clergy, and to kill, if possible, the principal clergyman. You, though you had it in your power, did not once endeavour to suppress the mob, but called them countrymen and fellow-dissenters. Your clergymen went about and drank with the mob, and even proposed toasts to them, as though they had been in league with them. You would not commission constables to disperse them, but made speeches which encouraged them. Your attorney gave the mob guineas, and did all he could to urge them to mischief, insomuch, that for some time after he was afraid he had said words that in a court of justice, before an impartial jury, would have cost him his life. You did not permit the military that was in the town to act, though their captain voluntarily requested it. You expressed the greatest satisfaction while the churches were on fire, and while the houses of the most respectable members of the establishment were in flames. You were heard in the public streets to exult in our misfortunes. Your bigotted fury stifled all sense of justice, and every feeling of humanity. Your clergymen searched our cabinets, and ransacked our libraries, secreted our letters, or  
‘ sent

“sent them up to government, that the law might take  
“hold of those who escaped the mob and the flames.  
“You entered into subscriptions to defray the expences of  
“screening the wretches who burnt our houses, and who  
“would have taken our lives, from the just sentence of the  
“law. Instead of making us any compensation for the  
“injuries done us, you added insult to your cruelty, and  
“shewed that you did not repent of your crimes, by at-  
“tempting to defend them. Your clergy wrote a book to  
“prove that we had in effect burnt our own houses, and  
“destroyed our own places of worship. You endeavoured  
“to excuse persons whom every body knows were the best  
“friends of the rioters. You were convicted at the out-  
“set of giving the public, as a most undoubted fact, a palp-  
“able falsehood, and you excused that falsehood by telling  
“greater falsehoods. There is scarcely a sentence in the  
“whole book which cannot be demonstrated either in one  
“shape or other, to be a misrepresentation, a calumny, or  
“an invention of your own, from the beginning of it to  
“the end, and yet this very book you have circulated with  
“the greatest pains. Your clergy have in fact made them-  
“selves guilty of every thing the mob committed by exert-  
“ing every nerve to defend the conduct of those who per-  
“mitted, and of those who encouraged that mob.”

There is not, I believe, a man among them who would dare to lay these things to our charge in so many words—but there are many of them would rejoice if they could do it with the least shadow of proof.

I conclude with calling upon you to act worthy of your own character, and that of your ancestors—to remember that you are Britons, and the offspring of Britons. You have for many ages been famed through the world as the avengers and protectors of injured innocence, as the professed guardians of civil and religious liberty.

With

With you, in times past, a sure asylum has been found from the oppressor's wrongs, and the fury of the persecutor. You received and cherished the fugitives of a nation at that very time considered as your natural foe. And will you suffer the natives of the same clime, who live under and obey the same laws, who are the tried friends of your government, to be calumniated, oppressed, and trodden under foot, merely because the house they worship their maker in is not of Gothic construction \*?

In what, except in their form of worship, and that you by tolerating, have established—I say, in what do they differ from other Englishmen? Do they refuse to pay their share of the expences of government? Do they refuse to contribute to the support of the clergy, though they reap no benefit from them? Have they been convicted of treasonable practices? Have they entered into a league with the known foes of their country? Have they conspired to take away the life of a king, whose family was in effect raised by their ancestors to the throne?—If they are guilty of none of these things, are they to be treated by you—by you who talk of liberty—by you who boast of generosity—by you who are proud of your valour, as the scum and the refuse of the community? Shall your countrymen, your fellow citizens, your fellow subjects, men who have deserved well of their country, and who have been willing to sacrifice their properties and their lives for its sake—shall

\* The people of England are too attentive to the distinctions of sect. Those whose interest it is to deceive them are well aware of this foible. While they are quarrelling among themselves about such shadows, as modes and forms of religion, dogmas and names of sects, they are robbed of that substantial blessing liberty. Let them be persuaded to shake off such weakness. It constitutes the strength of their enemies. Let them be persuaded that the good man of every sect is a friend to his country. Let them be persuaded that religious animosity has been used as the most effectual engine of disunion. In addition to this, high sounding praises of our happy constitution has lulled the nation into political security. Remember, fellow citizens, political security is political danger, and in the long run political ruin.

they



they be treated by you as strangers, as aliens, and not merely as belonging to some other nation, but to some *hostile* nation, as suspected of treachery, or known to be the determined irreconcilable foes of you and of your constitution?

If the Dissenters have done evil, let those who are acquainted with the evil they have done, bear witness of it. But if they have not, why are they thus treated? If our foes, all impudent as they are, dare not charge us with any crime, why are we spoken of and treated as though we were guilty of every crime?

We are not afraid of having our conduct enquired into. We also call our adversaries to bring forward their charges, if they have any. If we have done any thing wrong, let all the world know it as soon as it can be proved.

In this instance, in particular, we dare meet the clergy, the magistrates, and the high-church party. We dare them to the most ample discussion, to the most narrow investigation, the severest scrutiny of the whole business.

You have sent addresses from many parts of the kingdom to thank his majesty for endeavouring to bring the *writers* of sedition to just punishment, and it would be well if there were as many petitions to the throne entreating that the *actors* of sedition may be brought to justice, and that as speedily as possible, be they who they may, and that a full and impartial investigation of the Birmingham riots may take place. Innocence, on which side soever, hath nothing to fear.

With respect to the inhabitants of Birmingham in particular, I take the liberty to remark, that whoever is not *against* the rioters is *for* them; and that, whether clergy or laity,

laity, by maintaining an obstinate silence, they become parties with the perpetrators of excesses which bear a strong resemblance to the irruption of the Goths and Vandals, if considered as merely the act of an ignorant and ungovernable multitude—to papistical persecutions, when we consider them as measures approved and vindicated by persons from whom better things might have been expected. Permit me to recommend to them a thorough consideration of the principles of mobbing. None but Dissenters suffered by the depredations of the 14th of July. Yet it is almost certain, that but for the timely arrival of the military, the mischief would not have ended with them. Every man, whether of the established or any other sect, who had plenty of wine in his cellar, or of provisions in his larder, would have been equally liable to the effect of their fury. Those who did not discountenance the dreadful business so much as they ought, that is, so much as they might have done, began to find that it was much easier to raise than to quell a mob.

Let those who made the mob the instrument of private revenge, or who in any shape gave countenance to its proceedings, be sure, before they arm themselves again with such a weapon, they are able to wield it. It is certainly two-edged, and will cut both ways. A mob is an unruly, as well as a many-headed animal. It can tell tales. Such an auxiliary will at all times prove dangerous as well as cumbersome to the party it is brought to support. It is more than probable, that it will act the part which history relates the elephants to have done when brought into the field in the battles of antiquity. Unable to withstand the darts and javelins of the enemy, they have been known to turn back upon their employers, and, mad with the anguish of their wounds, have produced a disorder and carnage among the troops they were intended to support, which, in case of their absence, the enemy would have been unable to effect.

Should

Should this affair be suffered to sink into silence and oblivion; should none of our countrymen see reason to adopt the measure which I would most earnestly recommend to them, of petitioning parliament to see justice done to both parties in every possible instance and degree: Should the clergy of Birmingham persist in vindicating every proceeding, and in praising every character of those who profess to be of the same religious opinions with themselves; and should the laity of Birmingham continue to cherish that blind and bigotted spirit, that detestable animosity against their fellow citizens of which a late proceeding affords a proof too unequivocal\*—the Dissenters must be contented to wait with patience the progress of truth and reason.

The probability that the progress of these will be an accelerated one has already filled our enemies with dread, and ought in the same proportion to exhilarate us with hope. The last rapid and astonishing successes of the French are written in frowns of melancholy and despair on every high-church countenance. The abettors of despotism have celebrated with execrations the downfall of tyranny. In vain have they called the glorious tidings falsehood. In vain do they endeavour to stop the tide of freedom's victory by moans and wishes. Let them stop their ears; let them shut their eyes, they cannot stop the progress of truth, nor tarnish the lustre of reason's triumph. It is the earthquake of liberty, and remotest nations shall feel its shock. Woe to the friends of oppression—woe to the concealers of truth—woe to the priesthood which corrupts religion, which supports itself by flattering the great, by defending extortion, by recommending intolerance, by placing every obstacle in the way of reformation,—Woe to those govern-

\* The affair of the low bailiff, which last Saturday was forcibly and illegally wrested by the high-church party from the hands of the Dissenters.

ments which are influenced by every motive but the happiness of the governed. Let them listen to the voices which call on them to reform, or we shall see them fall like lightning from heaven.

It becomes me to remind all the actors in these scenes that a day will arrive in which every cause must be tried over again, before an impartial tribunal; where the foes of truth, and the abettors of guilt, will not be able to shelter themselves under the calumnies of a Reply, the affidavits of false witnesses, or the terrors of a proclamation. In the affairs which relate to the subject of these letters, I entertain no doubt but Dissenters will there face their adversaries without the least apprehension.

I remain, My Countrymen,

Birmingham,  
November 2, 1792.

Your's, &c.

J. EDWARDS.




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#### ERRATA.

- Page 4. line 3 (*from bottom*) for *this*, read *their*  
 6. — 7, for *husband*, read *son*  
 31. — 18, for *town*, read *lump*.



